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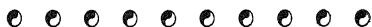
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*THE
LEO DUROCHER
STORY*



BOOKS BY GENE SCHOOR

THE LEO DUROCHER STORY

(with Henry Gilford)

CASEY STENGEL: *Baseball's Greatest Manager*

CHRISTY MATHEWSON: *Baseball's Greatest Pitcher*

THE JACK DEMPSEY STORY

THE JIM THORPE STORY: *America's Greatest Athlete*

RED GRANGE: *Football's Greatest Halfback*

THE STAN MUSIAL STORY

THE STORY OF TY COBB: *Baseball's Greatest Player*

THE TED WILLIAMS STORY

THE LEO DUROCHER STORY



BY GENE SCHOOR



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YOUNG PEOPLE
1962

CHAPTER ONE



FRANKIE FRISCH, fiery manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, eased his bony frame into the creaking swivel chair. The clubhouse was empty of Cardinals ballplayers now, except for the wiry, light-haired shortstop who stood on the opposite side of Frisch's desk, his face set in hard lines, his eyes blazing with determination.

He's been expecting this, the Cardinal manager thought. He's ready for me. Well . . . the St. Louis pilot drew a deep breath. He looked up at the grim-faced shortstop.

"Maybe you'd better sit this one out today," he offered.

"Not a chance," the other snapped right back.

Frisch's face flushed red with rage. He leaned across the desk, wagged a finger at the brassy player. "I still run this ball club, fella," he barked. "The string's run out on us; this is it. Either we beat Detroit today or the World Series is over for us. Finished. We go back to St. Louis a beaten ball club. We've got to win this game."

The scrappy young shortstop opened his mouth to launch his counterattack but Frisch stopped him with a wave of his hand.

"I can't take any more chances with you. I won't. Can't afford it. Okay, you're a great man with the glove. The best

shortstop in the league. Maybe in both leagues. But now we need hits, man! Hits! Lots of hits! Detroit's throwing Schoolboy Rowe against us today. Even good hitters don't hit Rowe. And let's face it, you're no big man with the stick. What have you got so far in the Series? Two scroungy singles in eighteen times at the plate."

Frisch leaned back in his chair. "You sit this one out," he ordered. "If we get a good lead, I'll put you in for defensive purposes."

The light-haired infielder, his jaw thrust forward belligerently, leaned across the desk and roared back at the boss of the famous Gashouse Gang.

"You can't do it, Frisch. You can't do it and you know it. The only guy you could put in there would let in more runs. Without me you haven't got a chance, not a chance. Look at the runs I've cut off—and I'll get my share of hits. Listen, Frank, I've waited a long time for this chance and nobody takes me out. You don't have a better shortstop in baseball and you know it." The last barb had struck home with a thud. The great Frisch wasn't so flashy any more, and he knew it. On many occasions during the season, his sensational shortstop had ranged far behind second base to spear a hot smash through the middle that should have been Frisch's ball to handle. But Frisch was determined not to give in to that bigmouth shortstop. That refugee from the Cincinnati Reds! He was lucky to be with a pennant winner after playing with those perennial cellar dwellers.

Still, Frisch did give in. The brassy shortstop did play. And, as the St. Louis manager was later to admit, it was fortunate indeed for the Cardinals that the spitfire player had outtalked his boss.

That season of 1934 had been a great one for Frankie Frisch and his Cardinals. After a dismal start, the Redbirds had put on a tremendous surge in August, and a glorious final week, to beat out Bill Terry's Giants for the pennant on the last day of the schedule.

The Cardinal's opponents for the World Series were the Detroit Tigers, who won their first pennant in twenty-five years under the managerial reins of their fighting catcher Mickey Cochrane.

The Cardinals soared to victory in the first game. While 42,505 Tiger rooters at Detroit's Navin Field muttered under their breath, Dizzy Dean laughed and clowning his way through an easy 8-3 victory.

Detroit fought back to the Series next day, as Lynwood "Schoolboy" Rowe pitched one of his classics to beat the Cardinals 3-2 in twelve innings.

The World Series shifted to St. Louis for the third game, and Paul Dean, younger brother of the celebrated pitching team, hurled beautifully, to beat the capable Tommy Bridges, 3-1. Throughout these first three games, the Cardinals' hustling shortstop fielded magnificently, covering the left side of the infield like a demon. He hadn't had a hit, however, in twelve times at bat.

The fourth game was all Detroit, as the Tiger sluggers went to work on five Redbird hurlers for thirteen hits and a 10-4 win. This knotted the Series again, at two-all.

Manager Frankie Frisch chose Dizzy Dean to oppose the Tigers' Tommy Bridges in the important fifth game.

This time the dependable Dizzy was thrown for a 3-1 loss, and the Tigers held the upper hand as they headed home for the decisive games at Navin Field. The Bengals

were pretty cocky, too, as they took the field for pregame batting practice. The biggest crowd of the Series, 44,551, was on hand to see the home-town boys nail down the World Championship.

But while the confident Detroit sluggers were taking their turns in the batting cage, St. Louis' manager Frankie Frisch was battling it out with his pugnacious shortstop in his clubhouse office. As it turned out, that meant the World Series.

On the mound for the Tigers for the all-important sixth game was the Arkansas schoolboy again, Lynwood Rowe. Opposing him would be Paul Dean for St. Louis. The overflow crowd broke into a roar as Rowe went into his big windup and fired the first ball at the Card's lead-off man Pepper Martin.

"Strike one!" bawled veteran umpire Bill Klem, and the clutch game was on.

The Gashouse Gang got to Rowe in a hurry. After Martin popped out, Rothrock doubled. Frisch fled to left, but Ducky Medwick drove a single into center field and the Cards were in front, 1-0.

The Tigers came clawing back to tie up the ball game in the third inning.

It stayed that way till the fifth, each hurler working carefully, not serving up anything too good to hit at.

The Cardinal's shortstop was to lead off the fifth. As the weak-hitting infielder selected a bat out of the rack, Manager Frisch called him over to the bench. "I should never have started you today. This game is the big one. We need all the hits we can get."

"Don't worry, skipper," the shortstop grinned. "I got a

feeling that today is my big day. Might even win the game all by myself—with my big bat, too.”

Frisch grinned, gave the shortstop a friendly cuff on the back. “Don’t make me sorry I started you—now get out there and get on base.”

The shortstop pulled at the peak of his cap. He set his jaw grimly as he dug in at the plate. On the mound, Schoolboy Rowe relaxed a little as he recognized the batter who faced him. In a tight game like this, it was good to face the puny-hitting shortstop every couple of innings. After him came the pitcher. Two easy players to pitch to. Two easy outs.

Rowe went into a lazy windup. He threw the first pitch. The fast curve broke low and off the outside corner.

“Ball!” called Umpire Klem.

Rowe peered down, picked off the sign from his catcher. Again the big motion, the pitch.

The little shortstop swung, cracked the ball sharply past the pitcher’s mound toward second base. Charley Gehringer, Detroit’s second sacker, hopped over like a rabbit, picked the ball up with his bare hand and, in the same motion, flipped to Hank Greenberg at first base.

But the scrappy Redbird shortstop, running with his heart as well as his churning feet, beat the throw. It was a hit!

“How about that, Frisch?” the chatterbox infielder called to his manager, as he took his lead off first. “I told you I could hit this pitcher. Now let’s get some hits. Let’s win this one. Come on, boys!” the shortstop screamed. Manager Frisch just grunted.

It would take more than an infield single to convince

him he hadn't made a mistake letting the spirited but weak-hitting shortstop play today. It could lose the Cardinals the Series. And it could lose Frisch his coveted manager's job.

With nobody out, Frisch called for the sacrifice, and pitcher Dean laid down a neat bunt to move the runner into scoring position. Pepper Martin stepped in, and the Cardinal bench clamored for Martin to get a hit.

Pepper responded by smacking a drive to left field. The Cards' base runner, the talkative shortstop, was off second base at the crack of the bat. He zoomed around third and raced for the plate. Runner, ball and catcher hit home plate together in a mushrooming cloud of dust. When the smoke cleared, the Tiger catcher was flat on his back, the shortstop in with the tie-breaking run, the ball bouncing around loose and Martin, who had never stopped running, wound up on third base.

Pepper then came in to make the score 3-1, as Rothrock was tossed out on a slow grounder.

The Tigers, still full of fight, brought the partisan crowd to its feet in the sixth inning as they scored twice to tie the score again, 3-3. But it wasn't to be the Tigers' day. The flashy-fielding St. Louis shortstop, ribbed all year and throughout the Series thus far as a "hitless wonder," had suddenly become a slugging demon.

With the score still tied, and one out in the seventh, the shortstop strode to the plate. The Tiger catcher-manager Mickey Cochrane squatted on his haunches and opened a barrage of steady chatter at the Cardinal batter. The shortstop stood quietly, waving his bat back and forth.

Rowe served up the first pitch, a sharp, breaking curve. "Strike one!" yelled the umpire.

The Detroit hurler, with the game and the World Series hanging on every pitch, wasn't easing up on the weak-hitting shortstop now. He blazed the next one through the middle, just over the knees.

The Cardinal shortstop cut at it, tipped it back into the catcher's mask.

"Strike two!"

Then Rowe made the mistake of trying to sneak a pitch past the hitter. But the scrappy little shortstop, playing his greatest game, slammed the pitch into the far corner in right field for a resounding two-base hit. The crowd roared in appreciation. The little shortstop, perching himself on second base, doffed his cap to the plaudits of his fans.

A moment later, he scampered home with what proved to be the winning run as Paul Dean rapped a sharp single to right to clinch his own victory.

In the ninth inning, the Cardinal shortstop cracked out his third straight hit, a single to center, to round out his unexpected outburst of hitting prowess. With the last out, Manager Frank Frisch seized his little shortstop in a tremendous bear hug, as the happy, thunderous Cardinal fans cheered the victory. The series was now deadlocked, and the next game would be the all-important one.

Riding high on the crest of this thrilling victory, the Cardinals overwhelmed the Tigers in the deciding game of the Series, 11-0, to win the World Championship.

After the previous day's display of batting fireworks, Frisch entertained no thoughts about benching his shortstop for the seventh game. And once again the scrappy infielder broke out in a rash of base hits, contributing a single and a tremendous triple to the Cardinal attack.

The final two games were doubly sweet victories for the Redbirds' shortstop. Known throughout his career as a "good field, no hit" man, ridiculed and ridden by opposition players as the "hitless wonder" and the "automatic out," it was a glorious personal triumph for the dashing little infielder to lead his St. Louis team to a World Series victory with his usually undistinguished bat.

Sweet triumph, indeed, for Leo Durocher, whose aggressiveness and sharp tongue earned him the nickname "The Lip," and who later was to become one of the most hated, most loved and most successful managers in the story of baseball.

CHAPTER TWO



THE HEAT ROSE in shimmering waves from the baking streets of West Springfield, Massachusetts. The summer of 1906 was one of the hottest in years, and though it was still early in the morning of July 27, the breathless heat had already overcome the small industrial town.

On School Street, an avenue of old frame houses on the wrong side of the Boston and Albany railroad tracks, not a soul ventured into the blazing sunshine. The thoroughfare was quiet.

Suddenly a tall figure appeared at the end of the street, moving with rapid strides, a small black bag in one hand. At No. 50, a weathered building the twin of any other on the run-down block, the man leaped up the steps and pushed open the front door. Coming in from the bright sunshine, he paused for a moment in the doorway to accustom his eyes to the comparative gloom of the indoors.

"Thank you for coming so soon, Doctor," said George Durocher to the tall man in the doorway. "I think it's time," he added, his words heavy with the French Canadian overtones of his native Montreal.

Mr. Durocher gripped the doctor's arm and guided him through the cramped railroad flat to a bedroom in the rear. The doctor took in at a glance the financial status of the

Durocher family—poor, honest, hard-working people, like all the other families this side of the railroad yards. Not much money, but generous with what they had, and with their hearts.

The doctor looked down at the woman lying in the bed. Short and stocky, she had a plain face, good features. Probably been working up to the last minute, thought the doctor.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Durocher," he asked kindly.

"I think it will be soon now, Doctor," the woman answered.

"Well, you have three fine sons now, Mrs. Durocher," the doctor said, feeling her pulse with practiced hands. "What's your order this time—another boy, or maybe a girl to help you around the house?"

Clara Durocher smiled weakly. "Whatever God sees fit to give me, Doctor," said the deeply devout woman. Suddenly her face twisted in pain.

The doctor turned to Mr. Durocher. "You have plenty of hot water ready on the stove? Good. Get one of the neighbor women in here to give me a hand. Then stay outside. Take a walk to the corner and buy yourself a supply of cigars."

He patted the worried husband on the shoulder. "She'll be all right."

The sun had risen and was on its way downward, and the shadows were growing long before the doctor finally left the bedroom of Clara Durocher. It had been a hard case. The doctor's face and body were wet with sweat. But he smiled reassuringly at George Durocher and the neighbors who had come to help and to wait.

"It's a boy, Mr. Durocher," announced the doctor.

"And what a boy. Such hands on him! Why, he's more like a—a"—he fumbled for the right description—"he's more like a baseball player than a baby."

The neighbors all laughed at the picture. They slapped the new father on the back and pumped his hand in congratulations. But in the darkened bedroom Clara Durocher smiled sadly at the doctor's remark. Ironically, up until two weeks before the day she gave birth to her fourth son Leo Durocher, she had helped support her household by working in a local factory—stitching baseballs.

She looked down now at her new son, with his red face and sparse blond hair. A baseball player, she thought. Such foolishness. But maybe he will be good in school and get a job in an office, not work so hard like his father on the railroad.

Her daydreams were interrupted by her husband, who came into the bedroom and leaned over to kiss his wife's forehead.

"So, George," Clara Durocher said to her husband, "we have now a fourth son."

"Yes, Clara," George Durocher nodded, "we have been fortunate. Four strong sons we have been given." He kissed his wife's forehead again. "Now I must go to work. The boys will be home soon. And Mrs. Miller said she will stay for a while. Don't get up too soon. Remember, you are very weak."

But before long Clara Durocher was on her feet again, bustling about the kitchen, preparing lunches and dinners and keeping the clothes of her family in good working condition. You can't feed four hungry boys and a husband if you're lying in bed, and the Durochers certainly couldn't

afford to hire someone to keep house for them. The neighbors helped, but they had their families, too, and Mrs. Durocher wouldn't allow herself to impose on them.

At night, when the breathless air was stirred somewhat by the cooling breezes off the near-by Connecticut River, Clara Durocher would sit by her bedroom window and look out at the gleaming stars, singing softly in French to baby Leo, and dreaming of the "old country," Canada. When she and George came here to West Springfield, it was, they promised themselves, only a temporary thing. Someday soon they would return to Montreal, when they had saved a little money and George perhaps could open a little business of his own. They had promised themselves this same thing when they first left Montreal for Cohoes, New York, where they lived before coming to West Springfield.

Now their promise was just a dream. They still talked longingly of going back, but secretly knew they would never leave West Springfield. But to each other, aloud, they still talked always of going back.

In his cradle, little Leo slept, blissfully unaware of the strange paths his life was to take, of the fame he was to win, of the friends and enemies he would make, of the troubles he would find himself in. But as he listened to the comforting voice of his mother crooning the familiar French lullabies, he could hear, too, the strange metallic clanking and chugging from the near-by yards of the Boston and Albany railroad, and the soot from the steam engines drifted in through the open windows.

The harsh facts of life were always right outside Leo Durocher's door.

As soon as he could walk, Leo Durocher learned to run.

He was quick and bright, a handsome blue-eyed blond with an amiable smile and a confident manner. By the time the impatient youngster was allowed to play outdoors by himself, he was the terror of the neighborhood. What Leo lacked in size, he made up in aggressiveness.

His small stature made him the target of all the other boys, but Leo fought back. Here in the streets of West Springfield, in the games and sports of the neighborhood youngsters, Leo decided that to win was the important thing. If you win the game, if you pin the other boy's ears back, you won't get kidded about your size.

Leo learned his lesson well. With his quick hands, quick mind and continuous hustle, he became adept at sports. He loved basketball, football and baseball. It was in baseball that he excelled, showing he was better than the other kids, winning the admiration of his young playmates, if not their wholehearted affection.

Every other activity was thrust into the background by Leo, often to the distress of his mother.

"Leo," she would call to him on spring afternoons, "come study your lessons." But Leo was in the school yard playing basketball, or more probably, around the corner on the sandlots playing baseball.

It was here on these sand lots, on Chapin Street near the railroad tracks, that Leo met the young man who was to exert such a tremendous influence on his destiny. It was here that the raw aggressiveness of the knee pants sandlotter was shaped and guided into the graceful skills of the man who was to become one of the greatest fielding shortstops in major league baseball.

"Come on, Goldy," Leo would yell up at Harlan Gold-

smith's window every day. "Let's go over to the lot and practice."

And every day Harlan Goldsmith would put aside his schoolbooks and join Leo on the sand lots across the street from his home.

Leo, in his street clothes, the ever-present finger glove stuck in his hip pocket, would trot out to the shortstop position. Goldsmith would stand in the batter's box, and hour after hour, day after day, the two would practice, the skinny little kid with the blond hair and determined manner, and his idol, the star shortstop for West Springfield High School.

First Harlan would hit ground balls to Leo, chasing him from the third base line to behind second. Then Leo would hit them down to Goldsmith, and Harlan would explain, patiently, how each play would be made, setting up imaginary situations with runners on the bases.

Sometimes the two of them would stand together at the shortstop position and Harlan would show Leo how to get down in front of the ball, to make the pivot on the double play, to go back for pop flies. The gathering gloom of the summer dusk would often catch the two of them standing out on the field, the tall figure and the short one silhouetted against the darkening sky, until total darkness forced them to call it quits for the day.

"Leo!" His mother's sharp tone brought him to a stop as he walked past the kitchen. Mrs. Durocher approached her youngest son, drying her hands on her apron.

"Leo, you can't keep coming home so late every night. It's not right. You are too little yet to be out playing in

the dark. I worry about you. What do you do every day that you come home so late and so covered with dirt?"

"I'm practicing baseball with Goldy, Mom," explained Leo patiently, trying to make his mother understand how important it was to him. "He's a terrific shortstop and he's teaching me how to be one, too. And someday I'll even be better than he is—wait and see, Mom!"

Leo's mother shook her head tiredly. "Baseball," she said. "On this you waste so many hours. If you would spend as much time with your books as you do with your baseball, you might someday be somebody. Learn a profession. Have an important job with a big company. But baseball!" She turned back to the kitchen.

Leo trailed after her, tugging at her apron. "But Mom, I will be somebody, you'll see. I'm going to be a baseball player. Goldy told me I'm good for my age, better than some kids on the high school team. You can make a lot of money playing baseball, Mom, more than you can working in a factory or on the railroad."

Mrs. Durocher walked back into the kitchen, still shaking her head.

"You'll see, Mom," Leo called after her. "Someday you'll be proud of me! Someday I'm going to be the best darned shortstop in the whole United States."

CHAPTER THREE



THOUGH IT CAN safely be said that Leo Durocher was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he certainly was born with a golden pair of hands. An instinctive sureness and natural quickness made him one of the best baseball players on the West Springfield sand lots at an age when most youngsters' skill was being tested at marbles.

And before he entered his teens, Leo was to find yet another outlet for his deft fingers.

One day he came home from school more excited than usual. He rushed into the house, searching from room to room for his mother. He found her finally in the kitchen, peeling potatoes for the evening meal.

"Mom, I've got a job after school," he announced with a rush. "Isn't that great?"

Mrs. Durocher didn't look up from her task. She was a calm woman, not easily excited. But she was glad Leo seemed to show signs of settling down. A job after school. That meant he was growing up, becoming more responsible.

"What kind of job, Leo," his mother asked finally, still peeling the potatoes.

"Down at Smith's Billiard Parlor," Leo began to explain. "I'm going to . . ."

"Where?" demanded his mother, interrupting him. "A

billiard parlor! What's the matter with you, Leo! That's no place for a young boy to work. Whatever got into you to take a job like that?"

"But Mom," Leo started again to explain, "it's not a bad place. It's sort of a social club, in a way. A lot of the fellows from high school hang around there. And some of Pop's friends from the railroad go there, too. It can't be a bad place if Pop's friends go there, can it?" he asked, with a youngster's simple logic.

Sensing that his mother was weakening, Leo continued eagerly, "All I have to do is brush the tables every day and keep the balls and sticks racked. And Smitty says I can practice all I want when the tables are clear."

"And how much money will this Smitty pay you for this work?" asked Leo's mother.

Leo looked down at his feet. He had been afraid of that question.

"Well, he's not going to pay me any money," Leo said haltingly. Then, with forced enthusiasm, "But the bigger fellows will give me lots of tips when they win games."

Leo's mother bowed her head resignedly. Her youngest son was becoming quite a problem—neglecting his studies, always playing ball. And now, a job in a poolroom!

Leo approached the game of pool the way he approached every other activity—with all his power of concentration. During the winter months he spent hour after hour at the table, studying the game with the intensity of a scientist tackling a complicated problem in physics.

Like everything else Leo did, he was driven by a fierce desire to win, to be better than the other fellows. Soon he

had earned the reputation of being as skilled a hand with the cue stick as he was with the baseball glove.

To the unbelievers, Leo issued a ready challenge, and before long the silver jingled in his pockets. He basked in his new glory as a poolroom ace, and though he gave his mother most of his tips, he kept enough to buy ice-cream sodas. And even at that early age, Leo started paying careful attention to his dress. He invested some of his poolroom earnings in snappy clothes, becoming the youngest dandy in West Springfield.

But baseball was his true love, and as soon as the spring thaw melted the ice on the Connecticut River, Leo cut short his stay at Smith's Billiard Parlor in favor of the diamond and Harlan Goldsmith.

Harlan was by this time the regular shortstop for the semiprofessional Merrick Athletic Club, but he still found time to tutor his young friend.

"Leo," Goldsmith said jokingly one day, "I shouldn't be teaching you so much. Someday you might steal my job on the Merricks," he laughed.

Leo didn't answer. Harlan was his best friend, his only real friend. But someday he *was* going to take Harlan's shortstop job with the Merricks. And someday soon.

That fall Leo entered West Springfield High School. Books bored him. He hadn't the patience to study. Other, more profitable, ventures beckoned to him outside the school walls.

It was not with too much surprise that Leo's mother received his announcement that he was quitting high school. He had completed one year.

"Mom," Leo said to his mother when school was out

for the summer vacation, "I'm not going back to school in the fall."

Mrs. Durocher, busily darning her husband's socks, gave no answer.

"Clarence said he could get me a job over at Gilbert and Barker's as an office boy," continued Leo. "And we could use the money. Besides, it will only be a temporary job, until I'm old enough to get on a real professional baseball team."

Leo's mother put aside the finished socks and looked up at her son, barely in his teens yet talking about earning a living and becoming a baseball player.

"Your father will be greatly disappointed, Leo," she said. "And I am, too. We had always hoped you would finish high school, study hard and maybe someday be somebody important."

"But I told you I will be somebody, someday, Mom," insisted Leo. "I'm going to be a famous baseball player—like Rabbit Maranville. He's playing with Boston now, making a lot of money. But he started out in Springfield just like me, Mom. He's important, too, Mom, a big man."

"If you want to go to work, I won't stop you, son," replied his mother. "Work hard and respect your superiors. But let me hear no more of this foolishness about being a baseball player," she admonished Leo.

So Leo became an office boy at Gilbert and Barker's, manufacturers of pumps and oil burners. But his restless nature didn't allow him to stay there for long, though his brother Clarence remained to become the firm's chief accountant.

Leo drifted to the Wyco Electric Company, then to

his father's railroad, the Boston and Albany, where he became a platform loader. In the meantime he kept at his baseball, studying and practicing every aspect of the game with his friend Harlan Goldsmith.

One day as Leo was walking home from the railroad yards, Tom Fitzgerald, manager of the Merricks, fell into step beside him.

"How are things going on the job, Leo?" asked Fitzgerald. "Like it?"

"It's hard work, but it's okay, I guess," answered Leo. "It's building up my arms and shoulders a little, too. I can use the extra muscle in my hitting."

"You really love baseball, don't you?" said Fitzgerald.

"More than anything else," said Leo soberly.

"Well, then," continued Fitzgerald, "how about joining the Merricks? We could use a good man with the glove."

Leo stopped short and grabbed Fitzgerald's arm excitedly. "You mean it, Tom, you want me to play with the Merricks? That's swell! But wait a minute. What are you going to do with Goldy? Move him over to second base?"

Fitzgerald grinned at the lad's self-assurance. "No. Goldy will stay at shortstop. You're the guy who'll play second."

"You've got a deal, Tom," snapped Leo, shaking Fitzgerald's hand. "But I won't be at second base for long. Shortstop is my position and that's where I'm going to play."

"Be at the lot on Chapin Street nine o'clock sharp, Saturday," reminded Fitzgerald as he left Leo at the corner. "We're going over the river to play the Liberty Braves.

"They're a tough team, so have your hitting shoes on, boy."

Leo waved good-by and hurried home, excitement running through him. "The Merricks!" he exulted. "Wait till Mom hears this. They're a real ball team! One of the best semiprofessional teams in New England. Scouts from the big leagues often watched these games for promising youngsters."

This was it, Leo felt. The big chance. As he walked through the darkening streets of West Springfield he built a chain of fantasies in his young mind. He would win a game in the ninth inning with a base hit, and a scout for the Yankees would be in the stands. Or he would save the game with a brilliant play at shortstop and two scouts would fight over him, offering contracts and bonuses.

Leo's pace quickened as he turned the corner of School Street toward his home. His feet fairly flew the last few yards. He raced up the steps and flung open the front door, running into the house.

"Mom!" he cried, running toward the kitchen. "Mom!"

CHAPTER FOUR



ERNIE LENICKA, tall, rawboned hurler for the Merrick A.C., turned his back to the plate and looked out at the scoreboard behind right field. His 3-0 lead had dwindled to 3-2, and now, in the fifth inning, the Liberty Braves were threatening again. With one out, they had runners on first and second. Their slugging first baseman was digging in at the plate.

Lenicka stepped back on the mound and took the sign from catcher Nick Beralis. He stretched, looked back at the runners, then threw to the plate. The hitter smacked it on one big hop toward shortstop Harlan Goldsmith, a sure double-play ball. But Goldsmith, overeager, tried to throw the ball before he had fielded it cleanly, and it trickled out of his glove for an error.

Now the bases were loaded, with still only one out. Manager Tom Fitzgerald called time and strode out to the mound. From his shortstop position Goldsmith came in, too, and Leo Durocher walked over from second.

"Sorry, Fitz," said Goldsmith. "That's the third one I've booted today. I must have butter in the pocket of my glove."

The manager nodded. He spoke to his pitcher. "Just

take it slow, Ernie," he said, trying to ease the hurler's tension. "Just make this next batter hit one on the ground. I'll turn it into a double play and you're out of trouble. How do you feel? Still got your stuff?"

"Yeah, sure, Fitz, I'm okay," insisted the hurler.

As Fitzgerald turned to walk back to the bench, Durocher caught his arm. "Listen, Tom," said the outspoken young infielder, "let me get in there at shortstop. Goldy's been having a bad day. I'll plug up that hole and show you how an infield really operates! We've got to win this one today. Can't lose it, and I'm the boy who can do it!"

Fitzgerald looked for a long moment at his second baseman. Then he walked over to Harlan Goldsmith. "Goldy, switch over with Leo. You take second. Let him play short and let's see if we can pull this game out today."

"Okay, if that's the way you want it, Fitz," said Goldsmith.

Durocher patted pitcher Ernie Lenicka on the back. "Get this guy to hit one down to me, Ernie, and it'll be all over."

With his infield realigned, Lenicka turned back to his task. He worked the count to three and two on the Braves' hitter. Taking his full windup, Lenicka poured everything he had into his fast ball. It was down the middle, just over the knees. The batter swung and cracked it sharply right back past Lenicka's ankles. It looked like a hit. But Durocher streaked over from shortstop at the crack of the bat, and as the ball skipped out behind second on its way to center field, he leaped out and gloved it, whirled, and in the same motion flipped to Goldsmith at second for one out. Goldsmith hurtled over the sliding runner and whipped

the ball to first. Double play! They were out of the inning safely.

The crowd roared its appreciation of the great fielding play as the Merricks trotted in to the bench. Fitzgerald, grinning from ear to ear, punched Durocher playfully on the shoulder. "Good boy, Leo," said the manager warmly. "Nice pivot, Goldy. You boys looked good on that play. I think we'll keep the infield this way for a while and see how it works out. Leo, you'll stay at short. Goldy'll play second."

The seasons flew by. Durocher grew a couple of inches and put on a few pounds. His blond hair turned light brown. But these were the only changes evident in Leo. Working on the Boston and Albany railroad loading platform, or at shortstop for the Merricks, he was still the same aggressive, brassy, pop-off Leo.

By then word of the Merricks' sensational shortstop had gotten around, and one mild April evening in 1925 the Durocher household had unexpected company.

"I'm Arthur Shean and this is Jack O'Hara," said one of the visitors, a pleasant, florid-faced man with twinkling blue eyes and sparse brown hair.

Mrs. Durocher smiled politely.

"I've been watching your boy Leo play ball, Mrs. Durocher," Shean continued, "and I brought Mr. O'Hara here with me a couple of times to watch him, too. Mr. O'Hara thinks like I do, Mrs. Durocher. Your boy has the makings of a fine young ballplayer."

Leo's mother said nothing. She wondered why these two men had come to her house. Surely not just to tell her they admired Leo.

"We think Leo ought to do something about his talent, Mrs. Durocher," Shean went on, encouraged by her silence. "He could really go places if he got the chance." Shean turned to O'Hara. "You tell her the rest of it, Jack."

O'Hara cleared his throat. "Well ma'am, it's like Mr. Shean said," agreed O'Hara. "We've been keeping our eye on your boy here, and we think he's got the right stuff in him. Now before I came down here today I talked to Paddy O'Connor of the Hartford club, and I told him what me and Mr. Shean think about Leo. I've spotted a few good youngsters before for Mr. O'Connor, and he takes my opinions seriously."

"To make a long story short, Mrs. Durocher, Mr. O'Connor says Leo can come to Hartford next week and try out with the team."

"Hartford!" exclaimed Leo, sitting at his mother's side. "That's a big professional team, Mom. They're a Yankee farm club!"

"Wait a minute, Leo," said Mrs. Durocher. "I don't think I understand what these men mean. Hartford? Is it any better for Leo to play baseball so far away from home when he can play here in West Springfield, like now? Why should he go to Hartford?"

"I guess you really don't understand," said O'Hara kindly. "Hartford isn't a team like the Merricks, Mrs. Durocher. Hartford is a professional club, in the Eastern League. If Leo makes the team, and I know he will, he'll be playing every day, not just week ends. And he'll be paid a regular salary. He can earn one hundred dollars a month—and more if he's good enough."

"One hundred dollars a month," she gasped. "That's more than Poppa earns."

Now Leo's mother fully grasped what these men were driving at. "You mean you want Leo to quit his job at the railroad to play baseball? To leave his home and his family to play baseball? What kind of foolish talk is this?"

"Leo wouldn't have to quit his job right away," O'Hara explained. "I'm sure his boss would give him a couple of weeks off to try out with Hartford. If something happened and Leo didn't make it, he could go right back to work."

"Sure, Mom," Leo cut in eagerly, "I could get two weeks off easy. And don't you worry about me making the team. I'll make it, all right."

"It's a wonderful opportunity for Leo," offered Shean. "He can make a lot more money playing baseball than working on the railroad. And it's a clean, healthy life. He'll meet a lot of other fine young men in the game, too."

"But to go away from home," protested Mrs. Durocher. "I don't know if it's right for a boy like Leo to go away from home by himself."

"Don't worry about Leo getting into mischief, Mrs. Durocher," smiled O'Hara. "These professional ball clubs have a lot invested in their players. They watch over them like a mother hen over a bunch of chicks."

"What do you say, Mom," urged Leo. "Hartford! Boy!"

"I don't know, Leo," answered his mother, rising from her chair. "I'll have to speak to Poppa when he comes home. I don't think it's a good idea," she said, returning to the kitchen.

Leo sat there, stunned into silence. Disappointment at his mother's reaction choked him. He bit his lip hard to

keep the tears from his eyes. But there was still a chance. He would talk to Pop tomorrow. He would understand about becoming a man and leaving home to play baseball. And if he could convince his father, together they would persuade his mother.

Leo walked Shean and O'Hara out to their car. "I'll swing Mom around, Mr. O'Hara. This chance means too much to me to let it get away. When do you have to go back to Hartford?"

"Well, we'll be at the game Sunday watching you play, Leo. But we have to be leaving early Sunday night. If you can talk your mother into letting you go, be ready by seven o'clock. We'll stop by the house then to see if you're coming along."

"Don't worry, I'll be there, Mr. O'Hara," Leo said grimly. "I'll be coming along. Nothing is going to stand in my way now. I'll talk to Mom and to Pop. He'll understand. I just know I'm going to make good in baseball."

CHAPTER FIVE



THE HARTFORD STADIUM was a beehive of activity, as some fifty or sixty players went through their paces under the watchful eyes of Manager Paddy O'Connor and his assistants. Though most of the uniforms bore the letters of the Hartford club, there was a liberal sprinkling of other uniforms, too, worn by the young hopefuls trying out for the Hartford team.

In the infield, working out with the regulars as if he'd been playing at their side for years, was a husky youngster with "Merrick A.C." lettered across the front of his uniform. Leo Durocher had persuaded his mother to let him try out at Hartford, and his boss had granted him the necessary time off.

Leo did whatever was asked of him at the tryout camp—and more. He played his heart out in the practice games. He displayed all the fire and brass that had won him his reputation on the sandlots, the all-out drive that attracted the attention of Arthur Shean and Jack O'Hara. The other ballplayers were genuinely impressed with his work in the field, and Leo knew it. Still, the two weeks were drawing to a close, with nobody indicating to him how he rated with the ball club. Several times Leo tried to approach

Manager O'Connor on the field for an opinion, but the Hartford pilot was always too busy to talk to him.

The day before Leo had to report back for work at the railroad, he walked determinedly into O'Connor's office.

"H'ya Paddy," he offered breezily. "Well, how do you think I'm doing?"

The dour-faced O'Connor, a big cigar stuck in his mouth, was sitting behind his desk reading a newspaper. He mumbled something out of the side of his mouth, not even looking up at Durocher.

Again Leo tried to arouse the manager. "C'mon Paddy, what's the story?" he asked. "Did I make the club? Do I play or don't I? What's the score?"

O'Connor just rattled the newspaper and mumbled something again.

Disgusted, Leo stamped out of the office. Nobody seemed to care whether he lived or died, much less played ball. Angrily, he stalked into the locker room, threw his clothes into a suitcase and walked out. He was still seething as he looked out the window of the bus taking him back to West Springfield. The heck with them, he thought. I've still got a good job and my place with the Merricks. Who needs them? Besides, Mom doesn't want me to play professional baseball anyway. But Leo couldn't shrug off his apparent defeat that easily. It riled him all during the long bus ride home. Early the next morning, Leo reported for work.

Meanwhile, at Hartford, manager Paddy O'Connor was looking over his roster, figuring his line-up for the first game of the season that day against Bridgeport.

He was having trouble with the shortstop position. His regular man was hurt, out indefinitely. Who could replace him? Again he went down the list of players. Suddenly his head jerked up from the desk. "O'Hara," he bawled. "Come on in here."

Jack O'Hara walked into the office.

"Where's that wise-guy kid you brought in here a couple of weeks ago, that shortstop? What's his name?"

"Durocher," said O'Hara. "Leo Durocher."

"What's the difference what his name is?" said O'Connor impatiently. "Where is he?"

O'Hara shrugged. "Went back home, I guess."

"Well, don't just stand there—get him in here," O'Connor yelled. "I need a shortstop. Today!"

O'Hara was out the door in a flash, sprinting for his car. Keeping his foot jammed on the accelerator all the way, risking a ticket, O'Hara reached West Springfield in record time. He drove straight to the railroad platform where Leo was working.

"Let's go, Leo," O'Hara called to the startled Durocher. "You're holding up the ball game."

"What are you talking about, what are you doing here?" stammered the bewildered Durocher.

"What do you think I'm doing here, you lug!" shouted O'Hara. "You made it. O'Connor sent me up here to get you. You've got to play today. Let's get going, time's a wasting," said O'Hara, glad for the boy, proud, too, that his faith in Leo's ability was paying off.

"Come on," urged O'Hara, as Leo still stood there, not yet believing it. "I'll drive you home. Throw a couple of

things in a bag, kiss your mother good-by. You can change into your uniform in the car, on the way down."

"Uniform!" exclaimed Leo, snapping out of his reverie. "Holy cow! I don't even have one. The only one I own is all torn. Mom was going to fix it for next Saturday's game."

"Well, borrow one someplace," said O'Hara. "One of your friends must have one he'll lend you."

Leo snapped his fingers. "I know," he said. "Just a second while I let the boss know. Then we're off, O'Hara!"

Durocher jumped off the platform and eased into the front seat beside O'Hara. "Drive me over to Chapin Street, to my friend Goldy's house," directed Leo. "He'll let me have his uniform. He's the guy who taught me to play ball, you know."

"Remind me to shake his hand when we get there," said O'Hara, shooting the car forward.

Leo was halfway out of the car as O'Hara brought it to a stop in front of Harlan Goldsmith's house. He took the steps two at a time.

"Hey Goldy," he called, charging through the front door. "Where are you?"

His friend appeared out of a back bedroom. "What's going on, Leo? What's all the yelling and hollering about? The house on fire or something?"

"No, no. Listen, Goldy. I don't have time to explain the whole thing. But I got to report to Hartford today, right away. I'm going to play shortstop for them. Jack O'Hara's outside in the car right now waiting to drive me down there. But I don't have my uniform ready. It's all torn."

Goldsmith just stood there. Leo was so excited he wasn't

making much sense. "I don't get it. What's it all about, Leo?"

"Never mind, Goldy. I'll write you a letter. Just lend me your uniform now—okay?"

"Sure, Leo. Why didn't you say so?" said Goldsmith. "I'll get it for you in a minute."

Leo thanked his friend hurriedly and rushed out of the house to the waiting car. "Now over to my house," he said to O'Hara, springing into the front seat.

Again Leo leaped from the car. O'Hara trailed behind him. "Mom!" Leo called to his mother. "Hey, Mom!"

Mrs. Durocher rushed out from the kitchen. "Leo," she said concernedly. "What are you doing home from work? Is something wrong? Are—"

She stopped short when she saw O'Hara.

"Mom," said Leo excitedly. "Mr. O'Hara drove up here to take me back to Hartford with him right away. It's all set. I'm going to play with them. Today!"

His mother turned inquiringly to O'Hara.

The scout nodded. "That's right, Mrs. Durocher."

Mrs. Durocher looked back to her son. "And you've made up your mind, Leo? This is what you want? You are ready to leave your home to go with Mr. O'Hara?"

"Aw, Mom," said Leo uncomfortably. "I thought we settled all that already."

Mrs. Durocher sighed softly. "All right, Leo. Go and pack what you need. I will make something for you and Mr. O'Hara to eat on the road." She turned her back on the two men to hide the tears that came suddenly to her eyes.

His battered suitcase again packed for the trip to Hart-

ford, Leo kissed his mother good-by. "Say good-by to Pop and everybody for me," said Leo to his mother. "Let's go, O'Hara," he said to the scout.

"Good-by, Mrs. Durocher," O'Hara said. "And don't worry about Leo. He's going to be all right."

The two men walked down the steps and got into the car, Mrs. Durocher following them as far as the doorway. Then stood there and watched the car move slowly off down School Street and disappear around the corner. Finally she turned and walked back into the house.

CHAPTER SIX



MANAGER PADDY O'CONNOR was anxiously waiting for them when they finally arrived at the Hartford Stadium. O'Hara's car, covered from hub cap to roof top with a thick layer of brown dust, was steaming from the frantic drive. O'Hara and Durocher, also choked with dust, got out sputtering and gasping for breath. Hardly stopping to shake hands with his new manager, Leo raced out on the field to play his first game of professional baseball.

He played regularly from then on. The Hartford management signed him to a contract for one hundred and sixty dollars a month, with a guarantee of ten per cent of the purchase price if he were sold to a higher classification club. Even then Leo was quick to figure the angles. He had no doubt a major league club would pick him up.

Right from the very beginning Leo was an immediate sensation at Hartford. He became the "take charge" guy of the infield, sparking it throughout the season with his caustic tongue and perpetual hustle. After he had been with the club two months, Paul Krichell, a scout for the New York Yankees, spotted Leo and recommended that they buy the contract of the pepper pot shortstop. The Yankees did, for seventy-five hundred dollars. Leo pocketed his seven hundred and fifty dollars, and at the same time

asked the Hartford management for a raise—to two hundred a month.

Leo was in his glory. The Yankees had signed him, the money was rolling in. His aggressiveness on the field endeared him to the Hartford fans, if not to his teammates and opposing players. The only thing that clouded Leo's life was his hitting, a weakness that was to plague him throughout his baseball career. Leo Durocher: good field, no hit.

In 151 games with Hartford in 1925, Leo batted an unimpressive .220. Still, he was a magician with the glove, a whiz at making the double play. Despite his poor work in the hitting department, the Yankees were willing to take a chance on him.

The 1925 baseball season and the month of September were practically gone when manager Paddy O'Connor called Leo into his office one day. Leo came in from the locker room, where he had been getting into his uniform.

O'Connor was sitting behind his desk, the usual big cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth.

"I got a telegram from New York this morning, Leo," he said quietly. "You're to report to Yankee Stadium this afternoon."

It took a split second for the words to sink in. Then Durocher's face split in a wide grin. "What did I tell you, what did I tell you, Paddy," Leo shouted happily. "I told you they wouldn't let me stay on this chicken feed club for long. No reflection on you, Paddy old boy," said Leo, who felt for the moment he could afford to be gracious to his manager. "They need a guy like me up there. Oh-ho, wait till the guys on the Merricks hear about this!"

"Hold your horses, boy," O'Connor said sharply. "I wouldn't be writing home the glad tidings so soon, if I were you."

"Why not?" snapped Leo. "The Yankees sent for me, didn't they? You're not kidding me, are you, O'Connor? If you are, so help me, O'Connor, as big as you are I'll take you apart! I'll—"

O'Connor stopped him with a wave of his hand. "Shut up, Leo," he said evenly, "and listen to me a minute."

The big manager shifted uneasily in his chair. He wasn't given to speeches. But he could see that for once Leo needed the facts of baseball life brought home to him clearly.

"I want to set you straight, Leo," he began. "Maybe I think you're a fresh kid, a little too big for your britches. But I'm manager of a baseball team. It's my job to develop and train fresh kids like you." O'Connor paused to relight his cigar, meanwhile organizing his words.

"I think you'll do all right in the major leagues, but not now. Maybe not next year either. Now let me finish," he said, as Leo opened his mouth to object. "Sure, I know what you're going to say. The Yankees sent for you, so they must want you. Kid, the Yankees need you now like they need last year's calendar.

"The season's over for them, Leo. They had a terrible year. They're stuck in seventh place. You think they're calling you up to nail down a pennant for them or something? Sure, you're good, and they've got their eye on you. They'd like to see you work out with them a couple of games. But that's all. Don't expect to stick. Not right away. Another year or two down here or with some other minor league

club and you'll be ready. I don't think you'll ever bust any fences," he smiled sourly, "but someday you'll make a darn good shortshop for somebody.

"Now get out of here," O'Connor concluded brusksly, suddenly embarrassed by his outpour.

For once, Leo was lost for words. O'Connor's obvious sincerity stopped the burst of sarcasm he had ready on his tongue. Unwilling to show any sign of softness yet, despite himself, too touched to jeer at O'Connor, Leo simply shook hands with his manager.

"See you around, Paddy," he said briefly, and walked out. At the doorway he turned his head and looked at O'Connor soberly. "Thanks," he said.

CHAPTER SEVEN



LEO DUROCHER walked up the steps of the dugout into the bright sunshine of Yankee Stadium. Out on the field the players were listlessly going through the motions of pre-game practice. Nobody paid any attention to the eager youngster in the bright new uniform. The Yankees, finishing one of their worst seasons in baseball history, were not in a greeting mood.

As Leo picked a bat out of the rack and swung it a few times, loosening up his shoulder muscles, a sharp crack from the batter's cage jerked his head around. He followed the sharply hit ball on its high arcing flight to deep right center field, where it dropped and bounced on one hop against the bleacher wall, over four hundred feet away.

Some blast, Leo thought to himself. He looked over at the big-chested guy with the puffy face and skinny bird legs taking his wings at the plate. "Babe Ruth," Leo said to himself. He couldn't suppress the ripple of excitement that went through him at the sight of the famous home run king. Me, Leo Durocher, he thought, standing here with Babe Ruth. Playing on the same team.

Ruth stepped out of the batter's cage and a tall, slim-hipped young man with tremendous shoulders stepped into the batter's box. His lean, clean-shaven face was topped

with dark, close-cropped hair. He looked about the same age as Leo.

"Let's go, Lou," yelled one of the men on the field. "Let's see you get hold of a couple."

Lou Gehrig, Leo thought, and watched, fascinated, as the big first baseman sent pitch after pitch rocketing into the right field stands.

Well, Leo laughed to himself, maybe I can't hold these guys' bats, but I'll bet I can play rings around their short-stop. Just let me in there a couple of games, I'll show 'em.

Leo didn't get the chance to show them, however. Not then. His debut with the 1925 Yankees was limited to two pinch hit appearances. He flied out once, walked the other time and scored a run. But his presence didn't go entirely unnoticed.

The final game of the dismal season was over and the Yankees were in the clubhouse, showering and getting into their street clothes. There wasn't the usual happy banter found in Yankee dressing rooms. Not this year. The players dressed quietly, shook hands with each other solemnly and went their respective ways. An occasional pat on the back and a "See you next spring," was called out. A seventh-place finish was nothing to chatter about.

Durocher, who had dressed hurriedly, was anxious to talk with Miller Huggins. The first flush of awe had worn off Leo and he felt as much a part of the Yankee team as anybody, including Babe Ruth. He didn't honestly think the Yankees intended keeping him with them, but there was a slim chance, and he wanted to hear what Huggins had to say about him.

Miller Huggins may have been manager of the great

Yankees, but to the brash young Leo he was no different from managers Paddy O'Connor of Hartford or Tom Fitzgerald of the Merricks. Leo walked right into Huggins' office and said what he had to say.

"We really stunk up the league this year, eh, Hug?" said Durocher, who already considered himself a full-fledged Yankee.

Huggins raised his eyebrows. "We? What do you mean, we?"

Leo, unabashed, gestured with his hand. "You know what I mean. We, the Yankees. We were lousy."

The Yankee manager grunted, barely suppressing a smile. He liked Leo. A short, slight, quick-thinking man himself, he recognized Leo's brashness and pugnacity as the natural defenses of a small man. But Leo wasn't ready to be a Yankee. Not yet.

Huggins, wise and thoughtful, didn't brush off Leo with some caustic comment. The manager was genuinely interested in all the young men who played ball for him, not only as players, but as youngsters growing up and meeting life face to face on their own. He was especially concerned with Leo, recognizing him not only as a potentially great ballplayer, but as an aggressive youngster who would take watchful handling.

Later, Huggins was to become a source of endless advice and encouragement for Leo. He would be the first man in baseball whom Leo could consider a true and understanding friend. And one man for whom Leo could honestly say he had a great and enduring affection.

Huggins wasn't quite sure which was the best way to handle Leo. But he realized that acting the gruff, un-

approachable manager would only make the shortstop sulky and bitter. If he could get across to Leo that he really understood him, they would be on common ground.

"Leo," Huggins said finally, "I'm going to send you out again. You'll report to Atlanta next year."

Well, that was it. Although Leo knew it was coming, he still clung to a hope. Maybe he could talk Huggins into it. The manager couldn't deny the Yankees needed infield help, not after this miserable season!

"Listen, Huggins," Leo said, "I belong with this club. You didn't even give me a chance to show you what I can do. Pinch-hit? Heck, I'm no pinch hitter. I'll be the first guy to admit I'm no great hitter. But I can outplay any shortstop in this league if you'll give me the chance!"

Huggins smiled. He would have been disappointed if Leo hadn't challenged him. "I know you belong with this club," the manager said. "That's why I'm sending you down to Atlanta. So when you join the Yankees again, you'll stick. I'm going to level with you, Leo. You're good. Darn good. But there are still some rough edges to be ironed out. Your hitting can be worked on, and a couple of minor things you do wrong in the field. Up here you'd just be riding the bench, and that's no way for a young player to learn. In Atlanta you'll be in the lineup every day. It'll do you a lot of good.

"And I'll tell you this," Huggins went on. "I like you, Leo. You're my kind of ballplayer. You're tough and you hustle and you don't take guff from anybody. Maybe everybody doesn't like you, but they don't like me, either. That's the way it is with us little guys. Sometimes we've got to use our elbows and our knees to get any place. Just remem-

ber this, kid. I'm on your side. Play for me with everything you've got and I'll back you up right down the line. And I promise you this—another year, maybe two, in the minors and you'll be back to stay. I'll be needing you—and I'm counting on you to make it.”

He stood up and put out his hand. “Good luck, Leo.”

Durocher gripped Huggins' hand firmly. Here was a manager a guy would kill himself for! A man who talked your language, gave respect as well as asked for it! “So long, Hug,” said Leo. “I'll be seeing you.”

“I'm sure you will,” said Miller Huggins.

CHAPTER EIGHT



THE PARTING WORDS of Manager Huggins were still ringing in Leo Durocher's ears when he got off the train at West Springfield Station.

"You'll be back to stay. I'm counting on you, Leo," the Yankee manager had said. I'm as good as a Yankee right now, Leo thought proudly. It's just a matter of a little time. He squared his shoulders and threw out his chest as he walked briskly toward a line of taxicabs waiting outside the station.

"Leo! Hey, Leo!" a familiar voice shouted. His brother Clarence came running up, gasping for breath. "Man, I've been chasing you down the platform, Leo. Didn't you hear me calling you? Maybe your head's so swelled up you don't hear right any more. C'mon, I got my car parked right outside," he said, taking Leo's suitcase.

"How does it feel to be a Yankee?" grinned Clarence, as they were driving home. "Not like playing with the Merricks, eh, Leo?"

Leo smiled. He had a hundred things he wanted to say, but he tried to sound casual. "They're all the same to me, Clarence," he said matter-of-factly. "Just more money."

Clarence chuckled, jabbing his elbow in his brother's

side. "Same old Leo," he said. "They offer you the manager's job yet?"

Leo didn't rise to the bait. "How's Mom, Pop, everybody?" he asked, as the car turned down School Street.

"Fine, fine. Everybody's great," answered Clarence. "You're looking good. That suit must have cost you a week's salary," he said, glancing sideways at his kid brother.

"Yeah," Leo said. "Had it made to order. One of the boys on the Yankees took me down to his tailor. It's the latest style in New York," boasted Leo, who was as jealous of his reputation as a Beau Brummel as he was of his renown as a baseball player.

"Well, here's the old homestead," announced Clarence, braking the car to a stop in front of the Durocher house.

Leo walked up the steps slowly. It was barely six months since Jack O'Hara had driven him to Hartford. It seemed like years, so much had happened in between.

"Hi, Mom," Leo embraced his mother. "How are you, Pop?" Leo shook hands with his father. "Same old house," said Leo, looking around at the familiar furnishings.

"Yes, same old house, Leo," said his mother. "Nothing has changed. And you, Leo, how do you feel, now that you've been away from home by yourself? Do you like it?"

"Now, Clara," said his father, "give the boy a chance to take off his coat before you ask him questions. Here, Leo, give me your coat. Hang it in the closet in the hall, please, Clarence."

"Thanks, Pop," said Leo. He was grateful for his father's deliberate interruption. He knew his mother still hoped he'd give up baseball and come back to West Spring-

field. It made him feel a little uncomfortable. He was glad his father understood how it was.

"Now, Leo," said Mr. Durocher, "sit down and tell us about everything. We've been reading about you in the papers, you know. We are proud of you, Momma and I. But tell the truth, do you really like it? You don't mind being away from home? Don't be too proud to admit it, Leo. Nobody will think anything wrong if you come back to West Springfield. You can get your old job back. And play baseball week ends, like before. We miss you, son."

Leo shook his head. "No, Pop. Working on the railroad or in a factory isn't for me. It doesn't have to be." He held out his hands. "I got these going for me, Pop," he said fiercely. "My two hands. They took me off the yards and out of West Springfield and they're going to keep me out. I'm good, Pop. I know it—and what's more important, the men that count know it. I'm going to make it, Pop, all the way. Just like I always told you and Mom I would. And you'll be proud to say I'm your son."

"We are proud now, Leo," said his father humbly. "Without your being a baseball player."

Leo smiled crookedly. "Thanks for the vote of confidence, Pop. But baseball's going to be my life. And it's a great life. There isn't a man in this town who wouldn't give his right arm to be in my shoes right now." He looked down at his shiny new black patent leather shoes with the stylishly pointed toes. "And they cost twelve-fifty, too," he grinned.

"Now what do you say, Mom?" said Leo, putting his arm around his mother's shoulders. "Can a hungry ball-

player get something to eat around this house, or do I go to a restaurant?"

"Supper will be ready in a minute, Leo," said his mother, smiling through her tears. "Go wash up."

George Durocher looked at his wife. "Maybe he's right in what he's doing, Clara," he shrugged, after Leo left the room. "After all, he played two games with the Yankees, didn't he?"

When supper was finished and the dishes dried and stacked away, Leo settled down comfortably in an easy chair. It was good to be home, good to relax a little. Nothing to fear here. He was home again. His mother sat in a corner and knitted, while Leo chatted lightly with his father and older brothers Clarence, Ray and Armand. Leo answered all their questions about baseball, and how it was at Hartford, but mostly he talked about his brief stay with the Yankees and what Miller Huggins had told him.

"So you won't be reporting back to the Yankees next year, Leo?" asked Ray.

"No, I'll probably be at Atlanta," Leo answered. "It hasn't been decided for sure yet. Me and Huggins talked it over, and we decided I ought to take another year at least in the minors before coming up for good."

"Sure," said Armand. "After all, you've only had one season of pro ball. It stands to reason you could use some more experience."

"Well, it's not that so much," said Leo. "I can hold my own with anybody on the Yankees right now. But you know, some of the older players might resent my coming up so fast. You've got to handle some of those babies with

kid gloves. I could tell you stories about some of those guys, boy, that would make your hair stand on end."

They all nodded sympathetically.

Leo stood up and stretched. "I think I'll take a walk over to Smitty's. What do you say, Ray, Clarence, somebody. Want to take me on for a game or two of billiards?"

"Not me," chorused the brothers. Armand laughed. "I might as well throw my money in the street as shoot pool with you, Leo. No, thanks."

Leo grinned at his brothers. "No guts. None of you. Guess I'll have to hustle a couple of the old gang then." He got his coat out of the closet. "See you all later," he waved.

Mrs. Durocher looked up from her knitting. "Don't come home too late, Leo."

"Don't worry, Mom," he said. "I'm always in training."

Leo was greeted like a returning hero by the crowd at Smith's Billiard Parlor and he acted the part to the hilt. Nattily dressed from his slicked-down hair to his shiny new shoes, he magnanimously accepted the handshakes and slaps on the back.

Leo took off his jacket and hung it carefully on a hook. "Made to order," he said, indicating the jacket with a nod of his head. "Same tailor as Babe Ruth's." Leo turned to the owner of the billiard parlor. "Hey, Smitty, got a table open?" he called.

"Sure, Leo, sure," said the owner. "For you I always got a table open. Take number three. Billiards, right?"

"Right," said Leo. "Who wants to join me?" he asked of the crowd.

"We'll make it sociable, so nobody'll get hurt," said Leo, who actually made less money playing minor league ball than many of the men present did in their skilled factory jobs. But he enjoyed playing the sport among his friends, a habit that was to get him into considerable trouble before long.

Playing easily, guiding the billiard balls around the table skillfully, Leo meanwhile told of his experiences at Hartford. With these men, too, as he did at home, he stressed the part about his meeting with Miller Huggins. It was "Me and Huggins, me and Huggins" all the way through, and the hangers-on ate it up.

Leo told it straight, but he needed the part about "Me and Huggins decided" to justify his going back to Atlanta. His slim hold on the Yankee uniform was what made him a hero to these baseball enthusiasts, and to say summarily that he was being shipped down for more seasoning would have taken all the edge off his home-coming.

Some of the fellows, especially those who had played with Leo on the Merricks, undoubtedly resented the youngster's budding success. That many of his fellow players were slightly envious and jealous was only natural. His roughhouse tactics had never made him particularly popular in the first place. By and large, however, his good fortune was accepted graciously around town.

Leo basked in the warmth of his new-found popularity, superficial as it was, all through the winter. Then came time to pack again. Now, however, it was handsome new matched luggage instead of the battered old suitcase. Leo believed in traveling in style, too.

"Boy, I'll be glad to get out of this freezing town,"

kidded Leo, tightening a strap on one of the suitcases. "Me for the sunny South, yes, sir. Atlanta, here I come."

"I hear it gets so hot there in the summer they have to play in their B.V.D.'s" grinned Clarence. "In August you'll be dying for some of this New England weather."

"Not me, buddy," said Leo. "I'm going to love the South."

Finally everything was ready. There was nothing left to do but say good-by and have Clarence drive him to the station.

"Well, I'm off again, folks," said Leo, with an attempt at heartiness. He embraced his mother. "Good-by, Mom. Take care of yourself. Good-by Pop, keep the railroad running on time." He drew a deep breath, took a final look around the familiar living room.

"We'd better get going, Clarence, if that rattletrap of yours is going to get me to the station on time."

"What's the rush, Leo," twitted Clarence. "It's a long ride to Atlanta."

CHAPTER NINE



It is a long ride from West Springfield to Atlanta, Georgia, but it's an even longer trip—though not in miles—from Atlanta to New York.

Leo didn't make the Yankees that year or the next. In vain he waited for word from New York, but none came. What kept the fire going under Leo those two years was Miller Huggins' promise. "Another year—maybe two—in the minors, and you'll be back to stay."

Leo's hitting in Atlanta was still weak enough to cause him concern. In 130 games, in 1926, he batted a low .238. But his fielding, as always, was superb. Meanwhile he fretted impatiently as he watched the Yankees stagger to the pennant, then lose the World Series to the St. Louis Cardinals. He scanned the box scores daily, read every newspaper story he could find about the Yankees, and particularly those about their shortstop Mark Koenig.

"I'll make that Koenig look like an armless monkey," chafed Leo, and piled into a sliding runner a little harder.

In 1927 Leo was shifted to St. Paul, in the American Association, where he batted a more respectable .253. His fielding, his hustle and belligerence burned up the league. Meanwhile, the Yankees were having one of their greatest

years. They won 110 games, setting an American League record which was to stand until smashed by the Cleveland Indians in 1954. It was the year Babe Ruth slammed out his still unequalled record of 60 home runs.

Finally, when the 1927 pennant was safely wrapped up, Leo got the call. He reported to the Yankees at the tail end of the season, but didn't appear in a game. At least he was wearing a Yankee uniform again, if only to sit on the bench and watch his teammates sweep the Pittsburgh Pirates four straight in the World Series.

This was a jubilant Yankee dressing room, far different from the one Leo remembered at the close of the terrible 1925 season. Good-natured horseplay filled the clubhouse with the raucous shouting and laughter of the jubilant Yankees.

Leo, smiling, but feeling left out of it, dressed quietly. He walked into Huggins' office, his stomach cold with nervousness. It was now or never. He was as ready for the Yankees as he'd ever be. If Huggins didn't okay him now, he'd . . . well, he didn't know what he'd do.

"Come in, Leo, I've been expecting you," said Miller Huggins. "Well, how did we look this year?" he asked smilingly, twitting Leo about his pungent comment when the Yankees finished seventh in 1925.

Leo laughed, feeling better. "Not bad this year, Hug," he said. "You might have won a couple more games with me in there, but we did all right."

Huggins shuffled a few papers on his desk, cleared his throat. "Well Leo, how do you feel? Think you're ready to play for this Yankee team?"

"I'll never be readier," said Leo earnestly. "Just let me into that line-up next year—I'll let this league know you've got a shortstop out there!"

Huggins rubbed his chin thoughtfully. His mind had long since been made up about Leo, but he liked to draw out the quick-tempered young man.

He smiled at him now. "We'll soon see. I'd like to find out whether all that noise you've been making around here is just a lot of hot air."

Durocher jumped out of his chair and leaned across the manager's desk. "You mean I'm in? You're bringing me up from St. Paul for good next year?" His voice shook with excitement.

Huggins nodded. "Keep it quiet for a while, Leo. We're not ready to announce it yet. Probably won't be until sometime in the middle of the winter. I know it won't be easy, but you've got to promise me you won't tell anybody. If anything gets out, I'll deny it. And so nobody'll call me a liar, I might keep you down in St. Paul just to make the story stick."

"Keep it quiet?" said Leo, flabbergasted. "What do you mean, keep it quiet? It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me—and you want me to keep it quiet? What for?"

"That's a front office problem, not yours," said Huggins a little more sharply. "Let's call it a matter of public relations and let it go at that. But I'm giving you a fair warning, Leo. Don't let it out until I tell you it's all right, or I'll make it so hot for you around here you'll beg to go back to Hartford. The only reason I've told you at all is

that I promised you I'd bring you up when I thought you were ready. I didn't want you to walk out of here thinking I let you down."

Leo shook his head. "It's going to be tough, Hug, walking around with that inside of me, not being able to tell anybody. But if that's the way you want it, that's the way it'll be."

The manager stood up. "See you in Florida, Leo. Soon."

But breaking Leo Durocher into the Yankee line-up wasn't going to be easy. Squeezing any kind of rookie into that powerhouse Yankee team would be a problem, and a fiery busher like Leo.

The first indication that Leo was a special kind of problem had come in August of 1927, when he was still in St. Paul. The Yankees were playing an exhibition game with their farm team that day, and, in front of a sports writer, a strange conversation took place between Huggins and manager Bob Connery of the St. Paul club.

"Say, Hug," said Connery to the Yankee manager, "there's a good little shortstop playing for me you ought to take a look at today."

"Sure, Bob," agreed Huggins. "What's the kid's name?"

"Durocher," said Connery. "Leo Durocher. Came to us from Atlanta. Not too strong a hitter, but he's the best glove man I ever had down here."

The sports writer was puzzled by this exchange. What was the idea? Why were these two managers trying to make it appear that Huggins had never heard of Durocher

before, when Leo had been up with the Yankees already and was clearly Yankee property from the time his contract was bought from Hartford?

The reporter soon figured out the reason for this byplay, however. Many of the proud Yankees on the pennant-bound 1927 club would resent breaking up a winning infield to make room for a fresh youngster from the minor leagues, especially if they suspected it was a move planned long in advance. But if this rookie was a sudden "sensational find," it would make things a lot easier. And the sports writer was being counted on to print the story of the "St. Paul discovery," although the actual transfer took place during the winter. Hence the strange conversation, and Huggins' demand that Leo keep secret his promotion to the Yankees.

Well, mused the sports writer, if this is the stuff they're trying to pull, the Yankee management must be expecting trouble with this shortstop Durocher. Watching him break in next year would be mighty interesting.

CHAPTER TEN



THE YANKEES' 1928 training camp was brimming with confidence. Under the warm St. Petersburg sun the World Champions went cheerfully through their paces, working out the kinks and loosening up the muscles tightened by the inactivity of the long winter months.

This was the greatest club in baseball—Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Bob Meusel, Tony Lazzeri, Herb Pennock, Waite Hoyt. Any other youngster would have been overcome with awe as the great Yankee sluggers took their turns in the batting cage, but not Leo Durocher.

Looking puny compared to the powerful Yankee sluggers, Leo stood outside the batting cage. Impatiently waiting to hit, he let loose with a few barbed insults. The Yankees didn't let Leo's gibes go unchallenged. They knew how to handle fresh bushers.

As Leo's turn to hit came, he stepped forward toward the batter's cage. But another player brushed him aside and stepped in instead.

"Hey, how about waiting your turn!" yelled Leo at the player, who took his swings without bothering to answer.

Leo shrugged. The player finished his swings and again Leo started forward. But once more a Yankee regular beat him into the batter's box.

"Hey! What are you, a wise guy?" stormed Leo. "It's my turn in there and you know it!"

The Yankee turned coldly toward the rookie. "I didn't see your name on the reservation list, busher," he said mockingly. The Yankees around the batting cage roared with laughter.

Leo whirled. "A bunch of smart guys, eh!" he snarled. "I'll see how smart you are. I'm batting next. Let's see who's going to be brave enough to get in there ahead of me!" He was boiling with rage now, ready to take on the whole Yankee team, if he had to.

But when Leo tried to take his hitting turn again, someone did try to brush past him into the cage. It was the mighty Babe Ruth. Even that didn't stop Leo. He stuck the handle of his bat sharply into the Babe's midriff as Ruth tried to get by. Ruth gasped.

"Why you sawed-off little punk," roared the famous slugger, "I'll break you in half for that! What's a runty kid like you doing on this team anyway? You don't belong here. And you're not staying around here long, either. So scram out of the way and let a man get in there and hit!"

"Listen, you big ape," rasped Durocher. "Maybe you got a little more muscle than I have, but I've got brains, see? And I'll be playing in this league long after you're washed up! Now if you don't want this bat busted over your skull, you'll wait till I've had my turn at the plate."

Ruth was so stunned by the nerve of the fresh young rookie that he just stood there, mouth open, as Durocher stepped up for his practice swing. The rest of the Yankees, too, were shocked by the outburst. Leo had announced his arrival in the big leagues in no uncertain terms.

It didn't take long for the rest of the league, either, to learn that Leo Durocher had arrived. Every game Leo appeared in was enlivened with his big talk and aggressive playing. Overnight he became the talk of the American League.

Although he was not yet twenty-two, Leo was undoubtedly the freshest young player ever to reach the major leagues. He insulted everybody, and the more famous the player, the more enjoyment Leo got out of insulting him. Ty Cobb was his favorite target.

Cobb, then forty-two years old and with the Athletics, was in the last year of his fabulous career. But Leo tore into him with fiendish delight.

"Why don't you give yourself up?" Leo said to the great man during one game. "What are you waiting for them to do, cut your uniform off?"

Cobb, despite his fiery temper, would take plenty of riding from opposing players. But he had no intention of taking it from a fresh rookie. He turned and snarled graphic threats at Leo. But Durocher only laughed in his face.

"Go on home, Grandpa," mocked Leo. "You might get yourself hurt playing around with us young guys."

One time Cobb was on first, with two out, and on a single to center raced for third. But as he rounded second, Leo gave him the hip. Cobb, thrown off stride by the action, was cut down at third on a throw by Earl Combs.

Livid with rage, Cobb waited for Leo at the third base line as the infielder trotted into the dugout.

Leo chuckled as he went past Cobb. "Tough luck, old man," he said jauntily.

Furious now, Cobb snarled at Durocher. "The next time you try that trick I'll cut your legs off."

Leo wasn't laughing any more.

"You'll cut nobody's legs off," he rasped. "You've been bulldozing young ballplayers in this league for a long time, but you can't scare me. I'll give you the hip every time you come past me, if I can. And if you try to cut me, I'll stick the ball down your throat."

Cobb looked as if he were ready to kill Durocher, and the two of them probably would have started slugging in a minute if the umpires hadn't broken it up.

George Moriarity, manager of the Detroit Tigers, was another one of Leo's pet targets. He was a big, powerful man with a reputation for being a terrific fist fighter. But Durocher took him on anyway. There didn't seem to be any reason for it, since Moriarity hadn't said anything to Leo. The sight of the huge manager in the third base coaching box, however, started Leo off the first time he saw him. He opened up a scathing attack on the surprised manager and kept it going all afternoon. The next day Leo was at it again, even before the game began.

Moriarity was in a tough spot. He was sorely tempted to throttle his pesky tormentor, but he was twice Leo's size. Finally Huggins himself stepped in.

"Okay, Leo," he said to Durocher. "You've had your fun with Moriarity. Now stop riding him before he kills you."

"I'm not afraid of him," Leo snapped back.

"Nobody said you were," said Huggins. "But you're too good a player to get yourself crippled by the guy. So lay off."

Leo did, but there were plenty of others around the league to take Moriarity's place on Leo's list. And although he got into everybody's hair, Huggins loved him.

He went out of his way to say a good word to Leo now and then, to encourage him. And Leo blossomed under the manager's understanding guidance.

Leo still wasn't the Yankees' first-string infielder. Mark Koenig was the regular shortstop and Tony Lazzeri was at second. But Huggins never thought of sending Leo back. With Lazzeri frequently ailing and Koenig occasionally faltering at shortstop, Durocher made the perfect replacement for either. And his one old failing—his hitting—suddenly vanished. Leo was even hitting like a Yankee.

At the end of the first thirty-seven games of the season, Leo was hitting a gaudy .312, but his pace was uneven. He would hit .400 for a stretch, then scarcely get a ball out of the infield the following week.

It was a puzzle to Huggins. The sports writers noticed it, too. During one of Leo's hitting streaks, one of them asked Huggins:

"If Durocher can hit this way part of the time, why can't he do it all the time?"

The Yankee pilot shook his head. "If anybody could tell me the answer to that one, I'd give him fifty thousand dollars, because a player who can field like that would be worth that much more to this club if he could hit consistently. I don't know. I've watched him, worked with him, talked to him. Between us we can't figure it out."

Though Leo's average slipped well below the .300 mark, he got enough base hits to keep his presence in the line-up from becoming a dead spot in the Yankee offense. And no

one could come close to him in fielding skill, in speed, hustle and aggressiveness. He was rapidly developing into one of the game's great fielding shortstops.

Unfortunately for team harmony, Leo made no effort to conceal his triumph and he was always popping off about the shortcomings of the veteran players. His speed and hustle were making some of the regulars look like has-beens and he was rapidly becoming as popular as a rattlesnake.

But try as they might, they couldn't get Leo down. They insulted him, rode him, shunned him. He defied them all, fortified with the knowledge that he was the best fielder on the team and that manager Miller Huggins was right behind him.

Leo was playing the infield the way Huggins himself had always dreamed of playing it. The manager never missed a chance to tell the sports writers that Leo was one of the greatest he had ever seen. This, too, didn't help to ease the tension between Leo and the rest of the team.

Meanwhile, the Yankees were sweeping along in first place, the Athletics on their heels. They opened up a seventeen-game lead over Philadelphia, but the law of averages and internal troubles started catching up with them. The Athletics came on with a rush, as the Yankees started slipping. On September 8th, the Athletics took over first place, only to lose it the next day, dropping a double-header to the Yankees. That was the end of the Athletics' bid for the pennant. It was the sparkling defensive play at the key shortstop position by Leo Durocher that helped the Yankees bring home their third straight pennant. In 102 games, Leo acquired a respectable .270 batting average.

During the 1928 World Series with the St. Louis Cardi-

nals, Leo had the unusual experience of playing against his boyhood idol Rabbit Maranville. He promptly forgot his early hero worship and tore into Maranville with every insult in the book. Maranville let Leo have it right back, and the two of them had a lively feud going while the Yankees were overpowering the Cardinals four games in a row, to win their second straight World Championship.

Leo, filling in for Tony Lazzeri at second in the late innings of the Series, played without an error.

The roars of the World Series crowds had scarcely died out before a new cry went up: "Break up the Yankees!" After three straight pennants and two successive World Series victories in four games, the clamor went up to force the Yankees to sell some of their great players. But the Yankee management had no intention of breaking up the greatest combination of players in their history.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



LEO DUROCHER swaggered into the Yankees' 1929 training camp cockier than ever, determined to win a starting berth with the World Champions. Filling in for Lazzeri and Koenig wasn't enough. Leo was going to take somebody's job and he didn't particularly care whose. Second base, shortstop or third, he'd play any of them.

The winter months hadn't done anything to soften the attitude of his resentful teammates. And to this tension, created by the fight for infield jobs, Leo added another cause for conflict.

Durocher, the scrapper, the ruthless bench jockey, the cocky young rookie, may have been poison to his teammates and other players, but off the field the flashily dressed, fun-loving Leo was a popular young man. The Yankee uniform opened doors in every city he visited, particularly in New York. Leo, who had always hungered for companionship and flattery, soon attracted a crowd of followers who were, to say the least, questionable companions for a major league baseball player.

Though his rookie salary was comparatively moderate, Leo lived as handsomely as any of the higher-salaried stars on the team. He had an expensive wardrobe, went to night clubs regularly, and was quite a favorite at the smart res-

taurants. And Leo was having a good time. During the day he was a Yankee star, at night a café society regular. It was a far cry from West Springfield and Leo made the most of it. He might have gotten away with it if it hadn't been for the reputations of some of his acquaintances. But the gullible rookie was everybody's friend and an invitation to a party was not to be turned down.

Now, as the 1929 season was getting under way, Leo was beginning to feel the effects of the previous year's indiscretions. Some of the Yankees started rumors that Leo, who was known to be in debt, was actually mixed up with gamblers. Other stories of a similar nature reached the press.

Informed of the nature of the gossip spreading about him, Leo had only one answer: "Let 'em talk. I do all my talking on the ball field. When Huggins starts complaining, I'll start worrying. I play for him, not for those guys."

The Yankee manager was well aware of what was going on. Nevertheless, when the season opened he put Leo at shortstop in the starting line-up. There was no question in Huggins' mind about Leo's honesty and integrity, but he felt that he should do something drastic before he went too far.

Pondering the problem one night in a Chicago hotel lobby, Huggins saw Leo saunter across the lobby decked out in a Tuxedo. He jumped up from his chair and collared Leo at the front door.

Leo looked surprised. "Hiya, Hug," he said. "What's up?"

"Got a couple of minutes, Leo?" asked the manager.

Durocher glanced at his watch. "I'm a little late, Hug. Can't it wait till tomorrow?"

Huggins grimaced. "I think not, Leo," he said. "Let's go up to my room."

Durocher hesitated until he caught the look on his manager's face. Then he shrugged. "I'll call my friends and tell them I'll be a little late."

"Do that," said Huggins sourly. "In fact, tell them not to wait for you."

Durocher looked questioningly at Huggins, but said nothing.

In the manager's room, Leo stood impatiently as Huggins calmly took off his tie, opened his shirt collar, removed his shoes and finally sat down in an armchair.

"Where you going all dressed up?" Huggins asked.

"Out. To a party. Why?"

"Wear that thing much?" asked Huggins, pointing to the Tuxedo.

Leo gestured with his hands. "Not much. Just on special occasions."

"Well from now on, Leo," Huggins said slowly, "I think you'd better forget about that suit and concentrate on your baseball suit. That's also for special occasions. Every day."

Leo raised his eyebrows. "What's all this, Hug? Since when do you have to play nursemaid to me? I thought you were on my side?"

"I'm not only on your side, Leo. I think I'm the only guy who is on your side," said Huggins.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Leo.

"You know you don't have many friends on this team, don't you?" said the manager.

Leo shrugged. "I'm not trying to win any popularity contest. I'm just out to play the best game of ball I know how," he said. "And there's only one way I play it. Hard. Nobody cries for me, Hug. I'm not going to cry for anybody else."

"You heard any of the stories being told around town about you?" asked Huggins.

"Sure I've heard them."

"You've been stepping in some mighty fast company, I understand."

"I don't ask anybody who his friends are," countered Leo. "So I don't see that it's anybody's business who my friends are."

Huggins leaned forward in his chair. "Ah, that's where you're wrong, Leo," he said. "When you're working on the railroad in West Springfield, Massachusetts, it's nobody's business who your friends are. You can pal around with anybody in the world. It's your life, nobody else's. But that philosophy doesn't go up here. Not if you want to keep playing major league baseball. By the way, do you?" demanded Huggins.

"You know better than anybody that baseball's my whole life," snapped Leo.

"Well, then, you got to start living this life by the rules," continued Huggins. "I'm not talking about what you do on the field. You can beat the whole league's brains out for all I care. In fact, that's what I like about you. You know that. That's why I want to save you from the mess you're walking into. Leo, playing baseball in the major leagues, and especially with the Yankees, is like living in a

great big goldfish bowl. An awful lot of people are watching you every day. They don't like what you're doing. They don't like the company you keep. Something else, Leo, a ballplayer has a responsibility to the fans and to kids all over the country."

"Are you kidding, Hug?" exclaimed Leo. "There are guys on this team who are worse than—"

Huggins stopped him. "Never mind the other guys. There's a difference. Maybe they go hog-wild sometimes. They're no angels, I'll agree. Not by a long shot. But it's your friends that have made it tough for you, Leo—your friends."

"Who, for instance?" demanded Leo.

Huggins waved his hand. "Never mind names. You know who I'm talking about, Leo. Or maybe you really don't. But these men are no good for you. They're ruining you. They've got you tearing up the town, spending twice what you're making, getting you into debt up to your ears. They're not fit for a young ballplayer to mix with. I'm going to give it to you straight, Leo. You don't know it, boy, but you're on the brink of being shoved right out of baseball."

Leo's eyes widened in disbelief. "You're serious, Hug? It's as bad as that?"

Huggins nodded. "You can have a long, good life in baseball, Leo, or you can be out, but fast. You keep this up and no club would dare touch you with a ten-foot pole."

Leo looked defeated. "What do I do, Hug? I trust you. I'll listen to what you tell me. All I want to do is play baseball. What do I have to do?"

"Now you're talking smart," said Huggins. "It's not going to be easy for you, Leo. But it'll be easier than giving up baseball, right?"

Leo nodded.

"Okay," said Huggins. "From now on, no more Tuxedo parties. No more parties, period. No more all-night sessions in those Broadway poolrooms. No more hanging around hotel lobbies with strangers, no night clubs. From the ball park, you go back to the hotel and sit. You want to go to the movies, okay. But you go alone. You want to eat in a restaurant away from the hotel, you eat alone. In short, keep away from everybody. Let them call you a swell-head and a snob. But keep way from those fast, loose-talking Broadway friends of yours—or you're through, for good."

Leo sighed heavily. "I got it, Hug. Right between the eyes. But if that's how it's got to be, that's how it's got to be."

And he kept his promise, but Leo's trials weren't quite over. Far more serious troubles were still ahead of him.

Midway through the season, the smooth, sure-fielding Durocher started playing shortstop like a scared sand-lotter. He misjudged throws and was continuously out of position on the double-play ball. He was uncertain, hesitant. His hitting slacked off. He seemed to be falling apart.

The disintegration of the shortstop with the loud mouth and aggressive manner was viewed with glee in many quarters, but Leo wasn't ready to give up.

Peculiarly, he seemed his usual slick-fielding self on batted balls. It was only on throws that he looked bad. And it took very few games for Leo to realize that the throws

coming at him were acting strangely. And it was happening too consistently for Leo to believe it was accidental. From the outfield, from the infield, even from behind the plate and the pitcher's mound, the tosses were behaving erratically.

Leo got the answer. Fast. Some of the Yankees were throwing him curves and tossing the ball a little wide in a deliberate effort to make the shortstop look bad and get him out of the line-up.

A blind rage was slowly building up inside Leo. What to do about this apparent conspiracy absorbed him day and night. He couldn't go to Huggins. It was against his fighting nature. But there was one way out, one way to halt the attempted frame-up. There was only one man on the Yankee team Leo could talk to. That was Lou Gehrig.

Leo visited Gehrig one night in the big first baseman's room. "Lou," Durocher said, "there's something darn funny going on with this team."

"Well," Gehrig admitted, "we sure don't look like the team we were last year."

"I'm not talking about that, Lou," said Leo. "Have you noticed that I haven't been looking so good out there recently?"

Gehrig shrugged his powerful shoulders. "You're probably just pressing a little too much, Leo. We all are."

Durocher shook his head, smiling grimly. "I'm not pressing, Lou. Not me. But some of the boys are pressing. Pressing hard. On me. They're deliberately trying to make me look bad. Trying to get me benched. Shipped out to the bush leagues again. And I think you've seen it, Lou.

You can't play in the same game and not see those curves they're throwing at me."

"What do you want me to say, Leo?" said Gehrig. "And why are you telling this to me? Why not tell Huggins if you think the way you do?"

"I don't want to tell Huggins," said Leo. "I don't want to go running to the front office for help. This is between me and the other guys. I'm telling you because I know you're playing the game square. You're not on their side. Maybe you're not on mine either, but at least I know I can trust you. And the boys respect you. If I give you a message for them, it'll get home to them. That's all I'm asking for, Lou."

Gehrig nodded. "Fair enough."

"I fought hard to make the big leagues, Lou," Durocher said fiercely. "That's the only way I know how to fight, and the only way I play ball. Baseball is my life. I don't ask anybody to like me. All I want is the chance to play. Maybe I won't be around long, but nobody'll get me out of the line-up by playing dirty ball with me. Nobody's going to squeeze me out by making me look like a bush leaguer."

"I want you to give the boys this message, Lou. Tell them this: If they don't let me alone, if they don't start playing fair with me, somebody's going to get hurt. So help me, as sure as I'm standing here now, I'll split somebody's skull with a baseball bat!"

Leo stood up. "I want you to tell them that, Lou. And tell them that I mean it."

"I'll tell them," Gehrig promised. He put out his hand. Leo, surprised at the gesture, took it gratefully.

Gehrig smiled at him. "You're okay, Durocher," he said.

The great first baseman apparently delivered Leo's warning message, for the throws to shortstop came in accurately again and Durocher's fielding righted itself.

But the Yankees were through for the 1929 season. They didn't come close to the mighty Yankees that had dominated the league for so long, and Connie Mack's Athletics ran off with the pennant.

The loss of the flag was not the worst blow the Yankees suffered that year. A week before the season ended, their great manager Miller Huggins died suddenly.

His death stunned the players. They had known for a long time that Huggins was not a well man, but his death was still unexpected. The Yankees of 1929 were a tough, hard-boiled team, but they wept like babies when they heard the manager was gone.

Leo Durocher was one of those hardest hit. Huggins had been like a father to him, had been his one ally on a team that had tried everything to get rid of him.

"I guess this is the finish of Leo Durocher," Leo sighed sadly. "Huggins was the best friend I ever had."

Durocher was right. As Huggins himself had once said, he was not only Leo's best friend, he was his only friend. The Yankee management brought in Bob Shawkey, a former Yankee pitcher, to take Huggins' place. With one of the "Old Guard" at the helm, Leo knew his career with the Yankees was at an end.

Though he felt the blow was coming, Leo was shocked when he heard the news that he had been waived out of the American League and his contract had been sold to the

Cincinnati Reds, perennial second division dwellers of the National League. On the train to Cincinnati, Durocher sat slumped in his seat. His promising career in baseball seemed to be coming to a close before it even had a chance to get started. Still only twenty-three years old, Leo was on the spot. Huggins' lecture had come too late to save him from falling deeply into debt. With his reckless confidence he had spent everything he had earned and more. He owed money to his Broadway friends, night club owners and a score of New York's better haberdashery shops.

It truly appeared to be the end of the line for Leo Durocher. Fortunately for the headstrong, impulsive young man, however, he was to meet in Cincinnati another man like Miller Huggins. Instead of Cincinnati becoming the end of the line, it was to be only the beginning of a great National League career for Leo Durocher.

CHAPTER TWELVE



LEO DUROCHER reported to the spring training camp of the Cincinnati Redlegs a subdued young man. On the first day of practice, Dan Howley, the big, good-humored manager of the Cincinnati club, walked over to Leo. Howley knew all about Leo's escapades, but he admired him as a ballplayer. Still, this was Cincinnati, not New York, and Howley wanted none of his Yankee shenanigans.

After the manager and his new shortstop had exchanged pleasantries, Howley got down to business.

"Leo," he said to Durocher, "I want to get things straight between us right from the start. You're here to play ball for us, that's all. I know what you can do on the field, and I want you to know right off that I think you're a good little ballplayer. I like your style. But don't try any monkey business with me. If you start popping off around here and getting into trouble, I'll have you shipped right back to Hartford where you came from—and I'll see that you stay there, too."

For the first time in his life, Leo had been completely calmed down. The shock of his abrupt departure from the Yankees and the American League had sobered him. Now, facing Howley, he knew the big manager meant every word he said.

Leo didn't utter a sound. He didn't attempt to protest. He just settled down in Cincinnati and played solid baseball. He batted only .243 that 1930 season, as the Redlegs came in seventh, but his play at shortstop was as flawless as usual. He wound up with a .963 fielding average for the year.

What was perhaps even more important, his personal life seemed to be straightening out under the guidance of Cincinnati club owner Sidney Weil. The warm and understanding Weil proved to be a true friend in need for Durocher. He demanded that Leo list all his debts and liabilities, and by carefully cataloguing them in order of their importance, started Leo on the road to financial recovery.

But it was to be a long, hard road, and Sidney Weil's patient attempt to clear up the mess was soon hampered by his own depression-born troubles. Leo meanwhile coasted along, more relaxed than he had ever been in his baseball life. The Reds, who finished seventh in 1930, finished in last place in 1931 and 1932, despite the presence in the line-up of such fine players as Babe Herman, Tony Cuccinello, Ed Roush, Harry Heilmann and the brilliant-fielding Durocher.

During one stage of the 1931 season, Leo accepted 251 consecutive chances without an error. He went from May 15th to August 5th without a misplay, then fumbled a little roller tapped by Kiki Cuyler of the Chicago Cubs. Teamed with Cuccinello at second base, Leo helped tie the Redlegs' own 1928 record of 194 double plays.

Leo's infield play was one of the few bright spots for Sidney Weil during those depression years. In addition to his club's poor showing, Weil's financial reverses were get-

ting him down. He had to sell and trade some of his best players in an effort to keep his head above water.

Parting with some of his players was a personal loss to Weil, for the kindly club owner felt a real attachment to the men who played ball for him. But his most painful trade came early in the 1933 season, when he felt forced to part with Leo Durocher, in a player exchange with the Cardinals.

The Reds were in New York at the time for a series with the Giants when Weil broke the news to Durocher. Leo exploded with rage.

"I won't go!" he screamed at Weil. "I like playing ball here. I'm beginning to straighten myself out. I'll rot if you send me away to that chain gang outfit, Weil. You can't do this to me!"

"I can't help it, Leo, believe me," said Weil. "There's nothing personal involved. You know that. It's just a deal I've got to make, that's all."

"Well, I won't go," Durocher insisted. "Trade somebody else. I'll even play for less money."

"The deal's all set, Leo," Weil explained. "I've never asked you for a favor before, Leo, but I'm asking for one now. If you feel I've ever been of any help to you here, now's the chance for you to do me a good turn. Take this trade quietly, play ball for Branch Rickey like you did for me. That's all I ask."

"If you put it that way, I'll go," said Durocher angrily. "But I'll hold Rickey up for a raise. He'll have to pay me a thousand dollars more to play for him. And I want the thousand in advance—now!"

"I'll get it for you, Leo," Weil assured the agitated player.

"I want it from the Cardinals, Weil, not from you," said Leo.

"I'll phone Branch Rickey at his hotel now," said Weil, "and tell him you're on your way over. He's staying at the Alamac. Meanwhile, I'll tell him about the extra thousand."

Weil stood up and walked Leo to the door. "Good luck, son," he said. "And don't get into trouble."

"Yeah," said Leo. "Thanks for everything, Weil."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



LEO DUROCHER, outwardly defiant but somewhat unsure of his ground, faced Branch Rickey in the latter's hotel room in New York. Leo stared at the vice-president and general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals. He had heard plenty about Rickey, none of it to his liking. Rickey, in turn, had heard a great deal about Durocher—and the feeling was mutual.

Two more completely opposite characters would be hard to find. Rickey, a shaggy-browed, evangelistic idealist, was simple in his tastes, a learned man who stalked about the Cardinal clubhouse quoting the Bible to the players. The Cardinal executive, bedded in his hotel room with a severe cold, stared back now at Leo Durocher, his aggressive, high-living, loudmouthed, shortstop.

Though Rickey was well aware of Durocher's private derelictions, he needed him badly. The previous winter his star shortstop Charley Gelbert had shot himself in the leg in a hunting accident. On the field at least, Leo would fit the spot perfectly.

"Welcome to the Cardinals, boy," Rickey greeted Durocher.

Leo had no time to spare for pleasant conversation.

"Did Sidney Weil tell you I was on my way over?" he snapped.

"Yes, Mr. Weil informed me that you were coming," said Rickey.

"Well, you getting me that thousand dollars I asked for?" said Leo.

Rickey sighed inwardly. Well, they had warned him about Durocher. But he was what the Cardinals needed. "You'll be getting the thousand dollars," acknowledged the Cardinals' executive.

Durocher breathed easier. This was simpler than he had expected. Rickey was supposed to be a tight man with the dollar. "Good," said Leo.

"Yes," said Rickey. "I think Mr. Weil was most generous."

"Weil!" exclaimed Leo. "What do you mean, Weil?"

"He's giving you the thousand dollars, not me," said Rickey.

Durocher appeared shaken. He hadn't wanted the money to come out of Weil's pocket. "Well, as long as I'm getting it," he said sullenly. "When can I pick up the check?"

Rickey coughed. "You seem to be in a hurry for that money," he said.

Durocher nodded. "I have a few things to take care of."

Rickey drew a long typewritten list from behind his pillow. "Yes, I would say you do have a few things to take care of," he said, glancing at the list and then at Durocher.

"I see you've been doing a little detective work," said Leo, in a bitter voice.

"No hard feelings, son," said Rickey kindly. "I'm not so many years older than you that I can't understand a man sowing a few wild oats. But you've been a most indiscreet young man, and all you've got to show for it is a bad reputation and this list of debts. I'd like to know why."

"What's the difference?" shrugged Durocher. "I got them. I'll get rid of them."

Leo's stubborn belligerence would have exhausted the patience of most men by now, but the crusading Rickey was determined to make Leo his personal rehabilitation project.

"I'd like to help you, Durocher," Rickey said. "I think I can, with your co-operation."

"Yeah? How?" said Leo, still defiant.

Rickey consulted the list of Leo's indebtedness. "I understand you and Mr. Weil managed to satisfy some of your more impatient creditors," he said.

"We paid off a couple," said Leo. "But it was tough. I'm not making real big money, you know, and a fellow has to live a little, too. Weil had me on a tight schedule for a while, but I couldn't live on it."

Rickey nodded. "I see you've added alimony payments to your other problems."

Leo looked a little embarrassed. "It was one of those things. I guess we both were in too much of a hurry."

"Well, Leo, there is just one solution to the puzzle, and as I've said, it will require your utmost co-operation. And if you think the program Mr. Weil arranged for you in Cincinnati was rigid, wait until you see the one I've prepared for you."

"You mean you're going to put me on a budget, too!" exclaimed Leo.

"Exactly," returned Rickey.

"I told Weil they'd kill me here," muttered Leo to himself.

"On the contrary, Durocher," said Rickey, who heard the words, "we're going to bring you back to life. Give you a new life, in fact. Let me tell you something, Durocher. I consider myself somewhat of a competent judge of men. Despite the shortcomings of your private life, I think your career in baseball can be just beginning," Rickey predicted. "If you follow the path I'm going to outline to you now, there is no limit to what you may do. You're a fine ballplayer, and you have in you that spark that makes you a potential leader.

"Someday," Rickey continued, "if you adhere more closely to the rules of life, you might manage a major league baseball team yourself."

Leo grunted deprecatingly. But he was inwardly impressed with this eloquent man, genuinely anxious to rid himself of the constant indebtedness that was slowly choking him. "All right, what's the story?" he said to Rickey.

"First," began the St. Louis general manager, "you will be given an allowance each week for your personal needs. The rest of your salary will be doled out in regular sums to your various creditors—after your former wife has been provided for, naturally."

"And how much is this allowance of mine going to be?" asked Leo apprehensively.

"Fifty dollars a week," said Rickey.

Leo nearly hit the ceiling. "Fifty dollars a week!" he exploded. "Are you kidding? That'll just about cover my laundry bill," he said contemptuously.

Rickey smiled. "You might try washing your own shirts," he teased. "Honest humility might be good for you for a change, Durocher."

"I won't do it. No deal," rasped Leo.

"I'm afraid you really don't have any alternative," said Rickey quietly.

"What do you mean?" asked Leo.

"I mean that either you play ball for the St. Louis Cardinals or you play ball for nobody," answered Rickey. "And if you play ball for us, it will have to be on my terms. I don't want to seem unduly harsh, Durocher, but I must insist on this program."

This was familiar ground for Durocher. He had skated on the thin ice of oblivion before. "Well," he resignedly said to Rickey, "let's hear what else you have up your sleeve for me."

"Good boy," Rickey nodded, and proceeded to outline to Durocher the toughest program a major league baseball player has ever been asked to adopt. As Rickey blueprinted each item, Leo fell deeper and deeper into despair. But at the same time, he saw the justification for Rickey's strict demands. It was a rough deal, Leo thought to himself, as Rickey's voice droned on, but it was better than no baseball at all. And in a couple of years he'd be out of debt and ready to live it up again.

So Leo Durocher accepted the Spartan proposal of Branch Rickey, confident that there'd be better days ahead. After all, he was still playing baseball, wasn't he? As long

as he still had his sure hands and hustling feet, he'd be all right.

Leo's easy assurance, however, was not exactly shared by the program maker himself, Rickey. After Durocher had left the room, Rickey lay back in bed, resting easily against the upright pillows, thinking deeply about his adopted problem child. He wasn't so sure that Durocher could take it.

Was the plan too strict for the boy? he mused. Did it deprive the free-wheeling youngster of too much, too soon? It was possible that the burden could break Leo's spirit. If so, his value to the Cardinals would be lost, and a pennant with it. But what would be the gain in winning a pennant, Rickey sighed to himself, if a young man's pride and self-respect is lost in the process?

He switched off the light and went to sleep.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



THE ST. LOUIS CARDINALS of 1933 were still one year away from greatness. Despite the fine pitching of Dizzy Dean, who won 20 and lost 18, strong hitting by Joe Medwick, Frankie Frisch, Pepper Martin and Jim Collins, and the sterling play of their new shortstop Leo Durocher, the Cardinals that year were a disappointment. They wound up in fifth place.

Durocher, however, for the first time in his life, found himself on a team that appreciated his presence. The Cardinals played a spitfire brand of baseball that fitted Leo like one of his made-to-order suits. For once Leo found that he and his teammates spoke the same language. Together with the other Redbirds, Durocher heaped abuse on opposing players with a colorful train of profanity, then went out on the field and played baseball like a hungry tiger. The Cardinals were happy to have Leo.

But when the game was over, Leo turned in his tiger stripes. Following Rickey's order to the letter, he went his way quietly. The Cardinal bunch was a lively, practical-joking crew, given to raucous singing in hotel lobbies and rambunctious horseplay on railroad trains. But Leo became a loner, avoiding his teammates after baseball's business

hours. His only occasional companion on the team was Joe "Ducky" Medwick.

It was the following year, in 1934, that the Cardinals blossomed into one of the most colorful, picturesque teams in the history of modern baseball. They were the Cardinals of Dizzy and Paul Dean, Ernie "Showboat" Orsatti, Ducky Medwick, Pepper Martin, Rip Collins, Bill "Kayo" DeLancy and, of course, Leo Durocher. They had the perfect manager for that kind of team in second baseman Frankie Frisch, who had taken over the team in the middle of the previous season from Gabby Street.

"Now listen, you guys," Frisch said before the season opened. "Nobody in this league is going to push us around. Get that? You've got to get out there and win those ball games. There's no room on this team for any cream puffs. It's going to be no holds barred. That's the way we're going to play ball this year."

And that's just the way they played it, too. Not only did they play it rough and tumble, they looked it as well. The carefree, fun-loving players usually showed up at game time unshaven, dressed in uniforms still grimy from yesterday's game.

One day, early in the season when the pennant-bound team was still floundering around in the second division, Dizzy Dean remarked that even the way the Cardinals were playing then, they'd still beat anybody in the American League.

"They wouldn't even let a gang like this play in that league," snapped Durocher, the former Yankee. They'd

say we look like a bunch of guys from the gashouse," he said, looking at his unkempt teammates.

A sports writer who was on hand quoted Leo in his paper the next day, and the apt nickname, "Gashouse Gang," was tagged onto the colorful Cardinals.

The Gashousers certainly didn't start out the season like future pennant winners. They dropped seven out of their first eleven games and were tied with the Phillies for the cellar spot. But in May the Redbirds won twenty-one games and lost only six to climb back into contention.

With their winning stride regained, the Gang started their hi jinks again. The clubhouse, subdued for a while, again rang to the hillybilly singing led by Pepper Martin. And the practical jokes grew broader than ever.

One night, during a series with the Phillies, the Gang pulled one of their most hilarious pranks. At the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, where the Cardinals stayed when in Philadelphia, a formal, dignified banquet was in progress. Suddenly confusion and pandemonium broke loose in the banquet room. Three men, dressed in dirty overalls and carpenter's caps, had entered the dining hall carrying ladders, boxes of tools and other workmen's accessories. One of the men climbed a ladder in the middle of the room and began hammering loudly on the ceiling. The other two ordered diners away from their tables while they moved chairs around and began pounding nails into the polished surface of the floor.

"What is the meaning of all this?" sputtered the banquet's toastmaster, running up to the men. The three "workmen," Pepper Martin, Dizzy Dean and Rip Collins, stared back indignantly at the toastmaster.

"Get out of our way, Pop," Martin said to the astonished man. "We have orders from the manager to make a complete cleanup job here."

One of the diners ran down to the manager's office prepared to protest the outrage, but the manager hurried to the banquet hall to see for himself who the offenders were. When he recognized the Cardinal players he exploded in anger, but the diners, instead of sharing the manager's wrath, roared with laughter at the prank.

This part of the Gashouse Gang's world was not shared by Leo Durocher. He was too busy walking the chalk line Branch Rickey had laid down for him. On the playing field, however, Leo was the hub of the team. He was made team captain and, together with Manager Frisch, needled, scolded and drove the Cardinals to the 1934 pennant.

Characteristic of the Cardinals' spirit that year was the marriage of Leo Durocher during the final hectic week of the season. At a time when the ordinary ballplayer would have his mind occupied completely with the close pennant race, Leo found time for romance.

The object of Leo's affections was Grace Dozier, a beautiful and prosperous St. Louis dress designer. Grace Dozier was quite receptive to Leo's campaign, but she was also a red-hot Cardinal ball fan and felt Leo should be paying all his attention to winning games, not her affections.

Leo took his problem to Rickey. Another club owner would have exploded at Leo's romantic entanglement with a pennant chase on, but Rickey proved himself a master psychologist.

"Great guns, boy, that's wonderful!" Rickey exclaimed, for the Rickeyes were old friends of Grace Dozier's.

"What do you mean, wonderful?" said Leo. "She refuses to marry me."

"Refuses you? What on earth for?"

"She thinks I should be worrying about winning the pennant instead of getting married," complained Leo. "But Grace doesn't realize that she's making things worse for me instead of better. I can't sleep thinking about her. If we were married I'd be surer of myself. More relaxed."

"You're one hundred per cent right, boy," said Rickey, puffing excitedly on his big cigar. "I'll have to speak to the young lady myself." With that he picked up the telephone and dialed Grace Dozier's number.

"Hello, Grace, is that you? This is Branch Rickey."

"Why hello, Branch, how are you?"

"I'm fine, young lady," answered Rickey. "Now what's this I hear about your refusing to marry my shortstop?"

"Why, I—I don't understand what you mean, Branch," said Miss Dozier.

"I have Leo Durocher here in my office now," said Rickey. "He tells me you won't marry him. Is that right?"

"Well, I . . . really, Branch, this is a little embarrassing."

"Embarrassing!" said Rickey. "Young lady, we don't have time for you to be embarrassed. Don't you realize that by putting Durocher off you're jeopardizing the Cardinals' pennant chances? And I always thought you were a true Cardinal fan."

"Branch, really, aren't you being a little silly about this?" asked Grace Dozier.

"I assure you, Grace, I've never been more serious in my life," said Rickey. "If you love this boy, then for the sake of the Cardinals, I urge you to marry him at once!"

Her tinkling laugh came over the phone. "Tell Leo to come over and we'll talk about it," she said to Rickey.

Rickey cradled the phone, then turned to the anxious Durocher. "Go over and claim your bride, boy!" he boomed to Leo.

Durocher shook Rickey's hand quickly and raced from the room. "The pennant's in the bag, B.R.!" he called over his shoulder.

The pennant looked miles away on Leo's wedding day. On the morning of September 26th, Grace Dozier cried softly as she and Leo Durocher were married. In the afternoon, her bitter tears were matched by manager Frankie Frisch as pitcher Waite Hoyt of the Pittsburgh Pirates shut out the Cardinals to severely jolt the Redbirds' pennant hopes.

But as Leo predicted, marriage cleared his mind for baseball, and he became a veritable tornado as he led the Cardinals to a four game sweep of the season's final series against the Reds—and the coveted pennant.

The 1934 World Series with the Detroit Tigers was one of the most exciting in baseball's history. The Cardinals finally won it in seven games, and Leo's spectacular play carried into the headlines. He handled thirty chances without an error, including barehand stops, over the shoulder catches and acrobatics seldom seen in one series.

And Leo's bat, too, spoke with authority. Though he was a hitting bust for the first five games, batting eighteen for two, a percentage of .111, Durocher more than made up for it in the final two games.

The Tigers led in the series, three games to two, at the end of five contests, and the Cardinals' chances appeared

slim. Their only hope was that Paul Dean could even things the next day and keep the Redbirds alive.

The St. Louis team arrived in Detroit the night before the sixth game at about midnight and were greeted at the Book Cadillac Hotel by a howling mob of Tiger rooters. All night long the shouting fans circled the hotel, jeering the Cardinals and shouting slogans. They kept up the racket till dawn, apparently intending to keep the trapped Redbirds awake all night. In some cases they probably succeeded, but Leo Durocher slept like a hibernating bear.

The next morning on the bus taking the players to the Tigers' ball park, Leo looked chipper than ever as he paced up and down the aisle, rallying his teammates.

"Let's go, gang, let's go! We can beat these Tigers easy. . . . Let's go!" He never stopped his peppery chatter until the game was over and tucked away in the Cardinals' bag. Leo made no bones about the fact that he intended winning this Series, even if he had to do it singlehanded.

At that, he came close. Paul Dean and Schoolboy Rowe were pitching with all their craft, and the score was 1-1 when Leo came up to bat in the fifth inning. He hit a slow grounder toward second. Charlie Gehringer, the great second baseman, handled the ball cleanly, but Leo scooted like a scared rabbit and beat it out for a hit. Durocher came around to score the tie-breaking run as the Cardinals rallied, and before the inning was over they led 3-1.

But the Tigers fought back to a 3-3 tie. In the seventh Leo was up again and came through. He drove out an outside pitch for a smashing double, romping home with the winning run a moment later when pitcher Paul Dean singled. That did it—as far as the Tigers were concerned.

In the seventh game Dizzy Dean, who had won thirty games during the regular season, took charge of the Bengals and shut them out, 11-0. Leo weighed in with two singles and a triple.

The winning players' share for the Series, \$5,389.57, brought Leo closer to solvency than he had ever been since he first plunged into debt while with the Yankees.

And in the midst of the World Series excitement, one incident went unnoticed that had more to do with Leo's future than perhaps anything else he had done with the Cardinals.

In the heat of battle, second baseman-manager Frankie Frisch, the years catching up with him, walked over to Leo as the Cardinals took the field.

"I'm getting kind of pooped," Frisch said to Leo. "How about playing it a little closer to second and giving me a hand?"

"What?" Leo exclaimed. "Listen, you meat-head, go get yourself a wheel chair if you can't cover your ground. I'm not going to make myself look bad just to make you look good!"

Although Durocher and Frisch continued to work well together after this flare-up, they were never on the same friendly terms afterward and it finally led to Durocher's departure from the Cardinals three seasons later.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



THE CARDINALS OF 1935 had the misfortune to be pennant contenders the same time their rivals, the Chicago Cubs, put together an amazing twenty-one-game winning streak in September, to nose out the high-flying St. Louis Redbirds, in the chase for the National League pennant.

But for Leo Durocher, the Cards would have finished in the second division. His fiery defensive play, his spirit and hustle, drove the Cards to victory after victory. At the plate, Leo slammed out eight home runs when they were sorely needed, and he wound up the season with a sturdy .265 batting average.

The only fly in the ointment, insofar as Leo was concerned, was the widening rift between Leo and the great Cardinal manager and second baseman Frankie Frisch.

Too often during the 1936 and 1937 seasons, Leo let Frisch know that he was holding up the entire infield, and Frisch thoroughly resented it. But Leo stuck to his guns and blasted his best offensive year in 1936, with a fine .286 average. It was the best batting average of his career, but the Cards fell short as the Giants drove to the pennant.

The fabulous Gashouse Gang fell apart in 1937, finishing fourth, with a mediocre percentage of .526. They

missed the second division, barely beating out the fifth-place Braves by six percentage points.

Durocher, too, had his poorest season. He hit a lowly .203, and the sports writers jokingly began to refer to Leo as the "All American Out."

It was time for Branch Rickey to start a little housecleaning. In one of his shrewdest deals, he sold a sore-armed Dizzy Dean to the Cubs for \$200,000.

Rickey, who always played his trades honest, did warn Cub owner Phil Wrigley about Dean's arm trouble, but Wrigley purchased the famous pitcher anyway.

If the Dizzy Dean trade gave Rickey any pleasure at all, it was offset by another trade in the fall of 1937. It sent Leo Durocher away from St. Louis. Rickey considered it a personal loss, but his hand was forced. Even then, when he had to make the trade, he did it with a benevolent eye toward Leo's future, though Durocher didn't realize it at the time.

Months earlier, during spring training for the 1937 season, Rickey had called Leo into his office.

"You and Frisch been fighting much lately?" he asked.

Leo grinned. "No more than usual. I've been needling him again about getting a wheel chair, but we get along."

"Well, he's asked me to trade you," Rickey said.

Leo's jaw dropped. "Trade me! That ungrateful rat! I've been holding him up for years and now he's out for my neck, eh? Well, what are you doing about it?"

"Nothing. Not now, at least," Rickey said.

Durocher and Frisch were barely on speaking terms throughout the 1937 season, except for exchanging insult-

ing remarks. When the season was over, Frisch put it up to Rickey again.

It was an uncomfortable situation for the Cardinal owner. "It means breaking up a great infield, Frank," he said.

"It's either Durocher or me, Branch," Frisch said. "Both of us can't stay on this club."

Rickey sighed. "All right, if you're putting this on a personal basis, I'll have to do it."

Leo learned of his departure from the Cardinals from the afternoon newspapers. He was to go to the Brooklyn Dodgers for Joe Stripp, Johnny Cooney, Roy Henshaw and Jim Bucher. Leo went wild at the news. Brooklyn! They might as well have sent him to Devil's Island!

Durocher was wild with rage in his hotel room, pacing the floor, talking to himself, when Branch Rickey breezed in. Leo was ready to jump down his throat, but Rickey, always the psychologist, puffed a cloud of cigar smoke at Leo and smiled.

"I didn't think you were worth so much, Leo," he said, his eyes twinkling. "Imagine, four players just for you."

"Four players!" sneered Leo. "Four washed-up old men, you mean. So Frisch finally sold you a bill of goods!"

"Easy now, boy," Rickey soothed.

"Easy, my foot!" Leo bellowed. "It's bad enough you're trading me—but to Brooklyn!"

"Great guns, boy!" exclaimed Rickey. "Don't you ever see farther than your own belligerent nose? You have ambitions beyond being a player, don't you?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"If I just wanted to get rid of you," Rickey explained patiently, "don't you think I could have made a better deal than the one with Brooklyn? I feel you've a wonderful future over there. You've made a fine team captain for the Cardinals, and I'll bet my shirt, boy," Rickey predicted accurately, "that before long you'll be managing the Dodgers."

That stopped Leo cold. Rickey had hit him in a vulnerable spot. It was still a vague dream in the back of his mind, managing a major league ball team. Now Rickey had shoved the dream out front, into the open. And the perceptive Rickey noticed the effect of his words on Durocher.

"You play the kind of ball you're capable of, behave—and you'll go right to the top of the game."

"Just go there, boy, and keep yourself free of indiscreet entanglements as you've been doing recently, and you've a great future ahead of you."

Outside of the two teams involved, the trade between St. Louis and Brooklyn attracted little attention. It was October and the sports writers were preoccupied with the World Series.

Burleigh Grimes, Brooklyn's manager, could hardly have suspected that he was bringing to his daffy Dodgers the man who would soon replace him. Leo Durocher, of course, would have laughed in anyone's face had he told him the fulfillment of all his dreams was just around the corner. But Leo's journey to Brooklyn was putting him on the last lap in his quest for baseball glory.

Leo Durocher wasn't the only bombshell to hit Brooklyn in 1938. The harried board of directors of the Brooklyn

club, faced with another season of miserable attendance and a dejected ball team, brought in Larry MacPhail as general manager of the Dodgers.

Leland Stanford MacPhail was forty-eight years old when he took over the Dodgers. A noisily quarrelsome red-head, charming when he wanted to be, he had been a lawyer, a banker, an athlete, a baseball executive at Cincinnati and a captain in World War I. He had even been involved in a zany plot to kidnap the Kaiser during World War I.

MacPhail was a fun-loving man, but where baseball was concerned he was all business, and he did business his way or not at all. When he came to Brooklyn in 1938, the Dodgers had finished five straight times in the second division, the ball park was falling apart, the ushers and special police squads were packed with hoodlums. A complete state of lethargy had overcome the club from top to bottom.

The new executive promptly spent a quarter of a million dollars on Ebbets Field, cleaned up the park's staff, bought first baseman Dolph Camilli from Philadelphia for \$50,000 and brought in Leo Durocher from St. Louis.

The colorful combination of MacPhail and Durocher, two of the most bombastic individualists ever to enter baseball, was to keep the fireworks shooting over Ebbets Field for a good number of years.

MacPhail wasn't through maneuvering by a long shot. He hired Red Barber to broadcast the Dodger games, brought the great Babe Ruth in as a coach midway through the 1938 season and introduced night baseball to Brooklyn.

Despite all of MacPhail's efforts, however, the Dodgers

of 1938 were as bad as they had been before his arrival. This came as no surprise to the Dodgers' manager Burleigh Grimes. During spring training, when a reporter asked Grimes where he expected to finish that year, Grimes snapped, "A flashy eighth. Maybe seventh if a miracle happens."

The manager was merely being his usual frank self, but it brought MacPhail's wrath down upon his head. "If the Dodgers finish seventh, there will be a lot of heads rolling." It was MacPhail's favorite expression. And when Larry brought in Babe Ruth as coach later in the season, Grimes saw the handwriting on the wall.

But if anybody was going to take his place as manager, Grimes felt it should be his team captain Leo Durocher. Leo had been of tremendous help to Grimes, coaxing what mileage he could out of the Brooklyn players.

When the season was about over and Grimes was informed he was through, he called Durocher into his office.

"Leo," the manager said, "you're the man to take over this team. With that sharp tongue of yours, you'd jab some life into these weary players. Why don't you go over and ask MacPhail for the job?"

Durocher thought about it for a moment. "I've got to admit I'd give my right arm for the job, Grimes, but we've been pretty good pals. I won't cut you out while you're still here."

"I'm already out, Leo," said Grimes.

Durocher looked surprised. "Well, I'll tell you what. If you'll go with me to MacPhail, I'll put it up to him. But you go with me."

Grimes not only went with Leo, he presented the case to the boss himself.

"Here's the man to manage this team, Larry," he said, putting his arm around Leo's shoulders. And Grimes went into a long list of reasons why he thought Leo should have the job.

MacPhail dismissed the idea at once. "Durocher can't manage this club. He can't even manage himself. He's never had any experience managing. Why, he'd never be able to keep discipline. . . ." On and on went MacPhail. Leo boiled inwardly as MacPhail rattled off his faults. But since he hadn't expected to get the job anyway, he held his tongue.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



DURING THE 1938 World Series, between the Yankees and the Chicago Cubs, MacPhail called Leo Durocher over to his hotel suite. When Leo entered the room, MacPhail was lying on the bed.

"What's up, Larry?" asked Leo.

Instead of answering directly, MacPhail called to his brother Frank in another room.

"Come on in here, Frank," he said, with a grin on his face, "and meet the new manager of the 1939 Dodgers."

The official announcement of Leo's appointment took place later, at a luncheon for the press at the Hotel New Yorker.

"Have you signed a contract yet, Leo?" a reporter asked.

"No, I haven't," acknowledged Durocher, "but I'm not worried. When Larry offered me the job, I told him I'd sign a blank contract and he could fill in the figures."

"How about Babe Ruth?" MacPhail was asked.

MacPhail coughed. "Ruth was never considered for the post of manager," he said. "He could have stayed with us as a coach, but he said he wasn't available."

"Who are going to be the coaches, then?"

"Leo has picked two," said MacPhail. "Charley Dressen, who used to manage the Reds and who managed for

us at Nashville last year, and Bill Killefer, manager of Sacramento of the Pacific Coast League."

The reporters then turned to Durocher.

"What do you think of your team?" they asked him.

"First of all," said Leo, "I want to say that I think Burleigh Grimes did a great job with the players made available to him."

The reporters looked at MacPhail, but he didn't say a word.

"And I think the 1939 Dodgers will be a greatly improved club," added Leo.

"Why?" asked a reporter.

"Well, for one thing," said Leo slowly, choosing his words carefully, "Camilli should be a better hitter next year. We're bringing Pete Coscarart back from Nashville. Dressen says he's ready now. Cookie Lavagetto is improving at third—and we hope to make some trades to improve the outfield and pitching will be stronger all around."

"You going to get rid of Mungo?" asked a reporter, recalling the troubles Burleigh Grimes had with the ram-bunctious pitcher.

"Absolutely not," said Leo. "I think Mungo can win twenty or thirty games for us."

"Yeah, in how many years?" another asked, laughing.

"In one year," snapped Leo.

"How do you figure on managing this club?" came the question. "Got any special ideas?"

"I'm going to run it the way Miller Huggins ran his team," said Leo. "Just like Huggins—there never was a man could compare to Huggins for getting the most out of his

players. If I do half as well as he did, I'll figure I did a good job. Hug was the greatest."

The sports writers turned back to MacPhail. "How come you picked Durocher as manager, instead of a man with experience?" he was asked.

"Maybe you'll laugh," said MacPhail, "but I think Leo can provide the one product this club lacks most—what you might call the old college spirit. That's as vital to a major league team as the caliber of its players. And Durocher can fire up his players better than anybody in baseball. He's never been a manager, but wherever he's played he's been a standout, hustling ballplayer. What's more, Leo knows baseball—from every conceivable angle. He'll have the Dodgers hustling right from the start."

"He'll need more than hustle," came the cynical response. "He'll need better players than Grimes had."

MacPhail nodded. "He'll get 'em," he snapped.

With the conference over, Leo excused himself and took a cab across the bridge to Brooklyn. He got out at Ebbetts Field and stood on the sidewalk a moment, looking up at the expressionless walls of the stadium. He nodded to a guard at the gate and walked inside, down into the clubhouse, along the narrow, ghostlike corridor, up the steps of the dugout and onto the soil of Ebbetts Field.

It was a ghostly arena, now swept cold with the autumn winds. Leo stood in front of the dugout—his dugout now—and looked out on the empty stands. He stood there, silent for a full five minutes, then he turned and walked down into the clubhouse again.

The locker room echoed to Durocher's footsteps on the concrete floor as he walked slowly down the line of steel cabinets to the door with MANAGER lettered in gold on the front. He pushed with one hand and let the door creak open slowly. He entered the room, hot and stuffy with stale air, heavy with the odor of half-smoked cigars.

Leo walked around the big desk and eased himself gingerly into the dust-covered swivel chair, as if he weren't sure it would hold his weight. Then he turned the chair backward and swung his feet up on the desk. He sat there like that a moment, then let out a roar of laughter that bounced off the walls of the room and ricocheted hollowly down the long corridor to the Dodger dugout.

When the echoing laughter had faded out, Leo's face grew sober again.

"Your Mom was right, Leo," he said to himself.

Years ago—it seemed like ages—when Leo had been called up to the Yankees from St. Paul, a sports writer asked Mrs. Durocher what she thought about Leo's appointment to the great Yankees.

"I'll tell you, mister," said Clara Durocher, "my Leo was always a lucky boy. If he fell into the Connecticut River, he wouldn't even get wet."

I'm a lucky boy, all right, thought Leo, as he surveyed his new office. Manager of a major league baseball team. Me, Leo Durocher, the problem kid from the sand lots and the poolrooms! It took me a long time; it was a battle all the way up. But nobody can say I didn't fight for it.

Now it was time for some serious thinking, he reflected. I've got to look at things differently now. I'm not getting any younger. I'm thirty-two. My legs are getting creaky

and those chips in my elbow hurt with every movement. But playing isn't important to me any more. I've got another job now, a bigger one. The biggest job of all.

And I'm going to do a good job, too, he thought fiercely. Now that I'm up here, where I've always dreamed of being, nobody's going to knock me down. One thing I know, he promised himself, I'm not going to be one of these cold-shoulder managers. Not me. I'm going to get in there and help my boys the way Miller Huggins helped me.

Durocher rose from the chair and walked out once again to the Brooklyn dugout. He sat down on the bench and looked out on the field. He almost could hear the crack of the bat, the shrill calls of the players, the roar of the crowd, though the stands were silent and empty. He remembered back to his rookie days with the Yankees and how he sat on the bench like this, next to manager Miller Huggins, while Huggins, taking the disliked Leo under his wing, would patiently point out his managerial strategy. He'd explain to Durocher why he was removing the pitcher, shifting the outfield, putting in so-and-so to pinch hit.

Now, as Leo sat there on the bench alone, the newly won mantle of Dodger manager across his shoulders, he felt the weighty responsibility of it all. And for once in his life, he felt doubt. Can I do it?, he asked himself.

Leo lifted his eyes to the gray, overcast sky that lay over Ebbets Field like a leaden omen. "Stay with me, Hug," he said aloud. "I need you now more than I ever did before—and thank you, Hug, thanks for everything you ever did for me. I'll never forget it."

As Larry MacPhail had promised, the 1939 season brought new faces to Ebbetts Field. He bought pitchers

Whitlow Wyatt and Hugh Casey, and Pete Coscarart came up from Nashville to play second. Most important, MacPhail obtained outfielder Dixie Walker on waivers from the Detroit Tigers, in July.

It was a lively month for Leo. Very definitely he was on the spot. It looked like the Dodgers were headed for the depths of the second division again, and Leo was getting a roasting, not only from the baseball writers but from MacPhail as well. Goaded by the constant nagging, Leo's temper boiled over and he began to rip and fight again with umpires and rival players, or anybody else who stood in his way.

He got into several fist fights, was ejected from several games, even fined and censured several times by the league president Ford Frick. In fact, he came near suspension.

But as the season swept into August, the Dodgers came alive. They played their best when Durocher was at short-stop, but the strain of playing and managing was beginning to tell on him, and he had to replace himself often with young Johnny Hudson. The Reds and the Cardinals had too big a head start for the Dodgers to catch up, but they finished a creditable third. It was the best showing for the club in many years.

Leo had proven himself as manager and MacPhail as a front-office man, and together they expanded their operations. Leo began to build up his wardrobe again, and to be seen in the best places. In Florida and New York, MacPhail and Durocher were the live-wire boys on the beaches and in the night clubs.

Nobody ever worked harder than Leo to get the Dodgers ready for the 1940 season, and they were off to surprising

start. They opened with a tremendous burst and swept the first nine games before they were halted. Two new rookie stars joined the club that year, outfielder Pete Reiser and Durocher's eventual successor at shortstop, Pee Wee Reese.

Leo gracefully made way for the classy young shortstop; as a matter of fact, some of Durocher's more serious squabbles with MacPhail were over his virtual retirement to the dugout in order to give Reese his chance. In spite of their all-out effort, however, the Dodgers couldn't win the pennant, finishing second, twelve games behind the Reds. Everybody agreed that 1941 was the year Durocher had to win. Everyone seemed to sense it, even before the season opened. The fans, the experts, the players, Leo and MacPhail, they all had the feeling this was to be the greatest year in Dodger history.

The Dodgers had been third, second—and now they would take it all. To bolster the club, MacPhail secured two players who were destined for stardom, pitcher Kirby Higbie and catcher Mickey Owen.

The Dodgers started out like anything but pennant winners, dropping three straight to the New York Giants, their arch rivals. The volatile Dodger fans cried for Leo's scalp. What was their favorite, Dixie Walker, doing on the bench while old Paul Waner was playing? And why didn't Leo get a couple of good pitchers in there instead of those sore armed bums?

But Leo juggled and fought and the Dodgers started winning at last. In May, he inserted Dixie Walker into the line-up as the veteran Waner began to slow down. He made other changes, juggling the starting line-up daily, and started the Dodgers moving like speed stars on the base

paths. It was brilliant and exciting baseball the Dodgers were flashing for the faithful Brooklyn fans.

Still Leo wasn't satisfied, the infield needed improvement. Reese was going great at shortstop, but he and Coscarart somehow didn't click as a combination. Leo worked with Reese and Coscarart. He showed them how to pivot properly and get the ball away on the important double play. And it paid off. The Dodgers played brilliantly and won fifteen out of the next seventeen games, but then dropped six in a row. MacPhail was having fits and began blasting Durocher again for not playing shortstop himself.

"I don't need you just to manage!" he screamed at Leo. "With the players I got for you, I could win the pennant without a manager. Why don't you get off the bench and play some ball for a change!"

"Reese is great at short," Leo screamed right back. "What we need is a second baseman."

"Yeah, who have you got in mind?" sneered MacPhail.

"If you're such a big shot," jeered Leo, "why don't you get me Billy Herman from the Cubs? Then we'd win the pennant! I mean it, Larry. Get Herman and we'll win for you."

"Herman!" howled MacPhail. "Why don't you ask me to get you the moon?"

That apparently ended the subject, but several days later Leo was awakened by a phone call at 5:00 A.M. It was MacPhail.

"What's the idea?" yelled Leo. "You think I sleep half day like you?"

"Don't get excited, Leo boy," cooed MacPhail into

the phone. "Say hello to your new second baseman Billy Herman."

Billy Herman pepped up the infield and did a lot to steady the young shortstop Pee Wee Reese. He hit .386 in his first twenty games for Brooklyn. Billy took well to the holiday atmosphere at Ebbetts Field.

"Every day is like a World Series here," he said to Durocher one day after a hectic game at Brooklyn.

Suddenly the Dodgers stumbled into a losing streak, as the pitching staff came apart. Higbie was ineffective and Wyatt was knocked out twelve straight times. Every time the Dodgers lost a game, MacPhail screamed at Leo, "There'll be some changes made!"

On July 14, a piece of Durocher strategy temporarily stopped the Dodger skid. Kirby Higbie and Verne Olsen of the Cubs were tied up in a terrific pitching battle. It was the last of the ninth with a scoreless tie going, when the Dodgers filled the bases.

It was Higbie's turn to hit. As he started for the plate, Leo called him back, got off the bench and announced himself as a pinch hitter. The Ebbetts Field crowd booed Leo to the heavens. They wanted Higbie to stay in and have an opportunity to win his own magnificently pitched game.

Leo knew he had put himself on a spot, but he had to play it the way he saw it. If he failed to deliver, the crowd, the newspapers and MacPhail would ride him mercilessly. But Leo took the chance. And it worked. On the first pitch he pushed a perfect squeeze bunt past the mount, and Joe Medwick scooted home from third with the winning run. The crowd roared with delight and rushed out to carry a

grinning Durocher around the park, like a conquering hero.

When the Dodgers started to fade, MacPhail searched frantically for help from the outside. He picked up pitcher Johnny Allen from the Browns on waivers. Allen was thirty-six and a hot-tempered hurler who had been bounded around the American League because of his brawls. But he could pitch, was hard as nails and cool under fire—just what Leo and MacPhail needed for this kind of pennant fight.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



ALTHOUGH THESE 1941 Dodgers were not really a solid ball club, between Durocher's strategy and MacPhail's fast deals, they generally managed to field a winning team.

In August, the Dodgers were locked in a seesaw battle for the lead with the St. Louis Cardinals, and the boisterous Brooklyn fans flocked to Ebbets Field to cheer on their "Bums." For the first time in more than twenty years, Dodger fans had something to get truly excited about.

Durocher had his problems. His star hurler Whitlow Wyatt, during a game with Cincinnati, swallowed a glass of mouthwash, thinking it was water. His kid shortstop Pee Wee Reese kicked an easy ground ball and lost a game for the Dodgers. Two hours later he was still in the clubhouse, crying his eyes out. Freddie Fitzsimmons, the losing pitcher, tried in vain to console him. "Don't take it so hard, kid, next time you'll make a great play and save one for me."

Still Reese sat there sobbing as if his heart would burst.

Finally, Durocher decided that kind words weren't the answer. Maybe he could shock Reese out of his despair. "Come on, Reese," he snarled at the player. "Cut it out. You act like it's the last error you're ever going to make. There are plenty more with your name on it coming your way."

The young shortstop glared at Durocher, but he snapped out of his mournful mood.

It appeared to Durocher that the fates were conspiring either to deprive him of the pennant or drive him crazy winning it. Everything happened to the Dodgers. Ernie Lombardi, the huge Cincinnati catcher who ran like a turtle, even stole second once on a Brooklyn pitcher, his first steal in four years.

And the Dodger fans, in their frenzied enthusiasm, got on Leo's nerves. In the first game of a double-header at Ebbets Field, Medwick drove a towering drive into left that was headed for the scats and a home run, but a woman leaned over the rail and touched the ball and it was declared a ground rule double. Medwick didn't score and the Dodgers lost the game by a run.

Between games, a breathless usher came running up to Leo. "We can't hit a lady," he said to Durocher, "but don't you think we should throw out the man that brought her?"

Durocher's pitching staff was showing the signs of overwork.

The only thing that kept the Dodgers going in those frantic days was their fighting spirit. MacPhail had been dead right about Leo Durocher on that score. Leo needled, cajoled, threatened and inspired his team in a "knock 'em down and stomp on 'em" style that was keeping the Brooklyn club on top of the league.

In a most important game at Cincinnati, with the flag in sight, Leo's astuteness again asserted itself as a piece of quick thinking on his part won another game. Pitchers Johnny Allen for Brooklyn and Paul Derringer of the Reds were locked in a terrific scoreless pitching battle for fourteen

innings. Pete Reiser came up the for the Dodgers in the fifteenth inning, when Leo suddenly got an inspiration. Derringer had been pitching to Reiser on the fists all afternoon, close and belt high. Durocher also knew that Derringer always took his eyes off the hitter for a moment as he wound up.

As Reiser picked up his big bat, Durocher whispered to him: "After Derringer starts to wind up, jump back in the box a foot or two. Then, if he pitches you inside again, you'll have room to come around on the ball. You could time it—and belt it a mile!"

Reiser tried it, and drove a tremendous four-hundred-foot home run for the first run of the game. The Dodgers scored four more runs in that inning and won the game, 5-0.

Durocher looked like a bedraggled hobo when the Dodgers arrived in Philadelphia with a one-game lead. He had worn the same slacks, the same sport coat, the same tie, for nearly three weeks. He hadn't shaved during that time, either. As long as the Dodgers held the lead, he wasn't changing clothes. He didn't intend changing his luck.

The Dodgers won their first game in Philadelphia on Sunday, and between halves of the double-header scout Ted McGrew popped into the Brooklyn clubhouse.

"I got a message for you from MacPhail," he said to Leo. "He says pitch Luke Hamlin in the second game."

Leo exploded. "I've been doing pretty well up to now without him picking my pitchers for me. What's he trying to do, take charge now and take credit for winning the pennant?"

McGrew shrugged. "I only work here. MacPhail says pitch Hamlin."

"Nuts to MacPhail," snarled Leo. "Curt Davis is pitching."

But Durocher gave the matter more thought. MacPhail was still the boss. If Leo went against his orders, and the Dodgers lost the game and the pennant, Leo knew he could start packing his bags.

So he pitched Hamlin. Even the Dodger ballplayers were uneasy, because Hamlin's specialty was a home run ball—at the wrong time. He didn't disappoint anybody. In the very first inning he loaded the bases, then came in with a fat pitch to Danny Litwhiler, who promptly blasted it out of the park for a four-run homer! That was the end of that game.

It was the final week of the season and two games in Boston were next. The Dodgers won the first game on Dixie Walker's three-run triple in the eighth. But Reese had booted another grounder and almost cost the Dodgers the game. Durocher lay sleepless that night, worried, wondering. Should he take the youngster out the next day and play himself? Would it kill some of the kid's spirit if he benched him during this crucial series?

Leo remembered back to his own early troublesome days at shortstop, and Miller Huggins' faith in him. Reese stayed in the line-up.

A bleary-eyed Leo Durocher staggered down to breakfast the next morning. He had been up most of the night, juggling his next day's line-up around. Over his morning coffee, he read the papers. All he saw about the Dodgers

was "ifs." If the Dodgers won today and the Cardinals lost, Brooklyn had the pennant.

Durocher called on his ace Whitlow Wyatt to sew up the flag for Brooklyn. Wyatt had beaten Boston five straight times that season. He seemed to have their number.

The Dodger hurler, sensing the gnawing anxiety eating away at his skipper, patted Durocher on the back. "Just get me one run today, Leo," he said. "That's all I'm going to need."

The Dodgers got him one run in a hurry. Dixie Walker opened the game with a single, went to third on two infield outs and scored when Medwick beat out a slow grounder to third.

In the second inning, the Dodgers picked up another run. Again in the third frame the Dodgers scored, to lead 3-0. In the seventh, Pete Reiser homered to run the score to 5-0. From the press box came word that the Cardinals were losing 3-1. Someone on the Dodger bench yelled "This is it!" but Durocher shut him up. It was too soon yet.

In the ninth inning, Wyatt set Boston down one-two-three, while the press box yelled to the Dodgers' dugout that the Cardinals had lost.

As Wyatt got the last man in the ninth, the Dodgers leaped off the bench to a man and, together with the players on the field, they carried the pitcher and Leo Durocher on their shoulders to the clubhouse. The locker room was a madhouse, with flash bulbs popping and players shouting and laughing. Some were crying, too.

The ride back to New York on a special victory train was one long, hysterical party. Some of the players, as the

train neared New York, suggested that the team get off at the 125th Street station, in New York, to avoid the crowds that were sure to be waiting to mob them at Grand Central. Leo vetoed the idea.

"I don't care if they rip the clothes off your backs," he said. "We belong to those fans. They've been waiting twenty-one years for this chance, and we're not going to cheat them out of it. I gave the conductor orders not even to stop at 125th Street."

How was poor Leo to know that MacPhail would be waiting on the 125th Street platform to greet his team? The train roared right through the station, leaving the furious MacPhail standing there on the platform enveloped in a cloud of dust.

Leo thought it was a good joke on MacPhail when he heard about it later, but he had his mind changed rudely when Larry summoned him to his hotel room.

MacPhail didn't waste any time on congratulations. "Who gave the order to run the train through 125th Street?" he demanded.

Leo seemed surprised at the question. "I did, Larry. Why?"

"Didn't you get my wire that I was going to meet you there and board the train?"

"No, I didn't," snapped Durocher, who was rapidly losing his temper. He was tired, on edge from the bitter tension of the pennant race and, instead of congratulating him, here MacPhail was bawling him out for a petty thing like this. "Besides, I'm running a ball club, not a railroad train," he said.

"That's what you think," retorted MacPhail. "You're not running anything any more. You're fired!"

Fired! At a time like this! It was all Leo could do to keep from hitting MacPhail, but he walked out without a word. He had been fired many times before by MacPhail, only to have it blow over, but this time he wasn't so sure. Besides, it really got him down to have a run-in with Larry when they should have been out celebrating the Brooklyn victory. Leo felt bluer than he had been in a long time.

Exhausted, Durocher fell sound asleep, only to be awakened by the urgent ringing of the telephone. He looked at his watch sleepily. It was 3:00 A.M. Who the heck was calling him this hour of the morning?

It was MacPhail. "You stopping by the office this morning?" he asked, mildly.

"What for?" Leo yelled into the mouthpiece. "To get my severance pay?"

The next morning, Durocher found MacPhail seated behind his desk, looking fresh as a newly picked flower. "Well, Leo," he grinned, "I guess I gave you a hard time last night, eh?"

Durocher snorted.

"Well, now," said MacPhail, almost sweetly, "let's just sit down now and figure out how to beat those Yankees."

Baseball fans and writers have always maintained that Lady Luck handed the 1941 World Series to the Yankees on a silver platter. Maybe this is an oversimplification of the facts, but no one who saw, heard or read about the riotous contests could deny that two big breaks eased the Yankees' path considerably.

The Yankees of 1941 were a rough crew, from top to bottom. No pitcher could feel easy facing the Bronx Bombers, with such great names as Tommy Henrich, Charley Keller, Joe DiMaggio, Bill Dickey and Joe Gordon packing the line-up. And for pitching the Yankees could call on Ernie Bonham, Red Ruffing and Spud Chandler, as starters, with "Fireman" Johnny Murphy always ready in the bull pen.

But Leo Durocher felt his Dodgers' chances were good. They had won one hundred games in taking the pennant. Pete Reiser, at twenty-two, was the youngest man ever to win the batting crown, with a .343 average, and both Dixie Walker and Joe Medwick had also hit better than .300. On the mound, Leo had a couple of twenty-two game winners going for him in Whitlow Wyatt and Kirby Higbie. In the bull pen was Hugh Casey.

Durocher surprised everyone by starting Curt Davis in the opener, while Joe McCarthy countered with Red Ruffing. Both pitchers had plenty of stuff for the big game, but Ruffing had a little more, and the Yankees won the first game, 3-2.

Leo came back with his ace Wyatt the following day, and Whit came through, beating the Yankees 3-2 to tie the Series. The win was a tremendous one for the Dodgers, for the next two games of the Series were scheduled on their home grounds, Ebbets Field. The Brooklyn players felt they were in.

Sports writers visiting the Dodgers' dressing room after the second game found the Dodgers celebrating as if they had already won the Series, not just one game. To say the joy was a little premature would be an understatement.

The first big break of the Series came the Yankees' way in the third game. Again Leo pulled a surprise, starting the forty-year-old Freddie Fitzsimmons instead of Higbie. But Leo felt that old Fitz, a solid veteran hardened to the pressures of a World Series, was a shrewd choice.

It seemed a sound move on Leo's part as Fitzsimmons put on a terrific show in a duel with the Yankees' young southpaw Marius Russo. For six innings the youngster and the veteran matched scoreless frames. Then, in the seventh, the Fates literally whacked Fitzsimmons across the shins. With two out, Russo, at bat for the Yanks, smacked a low line drive right back at Fitzsimmons. The drive cracked Freddy right below the kneecap and popped into the air. Shortstop Reese caught the ball for the third out, but the drive had crippled Fitzsimmons, who had to be helped off the field, limping and groaning.

Relief pitcher Hugh Casey, who had to warm up hurriedly to pitch the eighth against the Yankees, couldn't get going and the Yanks cracked him for four straight singles and two runs. The Dodgers got one of the runs back in their half of the eighth, but that was all. The Yanks won, 2-1.

The fourth game of the 1941 Series has been called "The greatest World Series thriller in the history of the game." It was all of that, and more. It was a game the Yankees won after they had apparently already made their three outs in the ninth inning and lost. It was a victory the Dodgers had snatched right out of their hands by one of the worst breaks ever to befall a ball club.

Kirby Higbie started this one for Brooklyn, opposed by Atley Donald. Kirby didn't last very long. The Yankees got

to him for a run in the first inning and sent him to the showers with two more in the fourth. Larry French relieved him. Things looked black for Brooklyn, but Leo Durocher, snarling on the Dodger bench, needling his men, drove them back fighting.

The Dodgers came back with two runs in the fourth, to make it 3-2. In the fifth, Walker doubled and Pete Reiser blasted one out of the park to put the Dodgers ahead, 4-3. Then Marvin Breuer came in to pitch for the Yankees. For three innings Breuer and Hugh Casey, for the Dodgers, pitched scoreless ball. The Yanks came up in the ninth inning still trailing by one run.

Johnny Sturm led off for the Yankees. With the count two and two, Sturm bounded to Coscarart. One out. Red Rolfe hit back to the mound. Two out. One out from victory and a tied Series.

Now, "Old Reliable" Tommy Henrich was up. Casey pitched Tommy carefully. One bad pitch and Henrich could put one over the wall and tie up the game. The count went to two and two on Henrich. Then three and two. This pitch had to be it. Casey came down a low, breaking curve to Henrich. Tommy swung and missed. Strike three! The game was over! The Dodgers had tied the Series.

But wait! The fast curve, breaking sharply, had spun off the end of catcher Mickey Owen's mitt and was rolling toward the Dodger dugout! Henrich raced to first and beat Owen's frantic throw by a hair!

The crowd was stunned into silence. A moment ago the Dodgers had won the game; now the Yankees were still at bat with the tying run on first. And Joe DiMaggio stepped up to the plate.

Not only was the crowd stunned by the fantastic play, the Dodgers were, too. As a result, no one on the team had the sense to call time out and give Casey a chance to recover from the blow. Leo Durocher was shocked into paralysis, too numb to move.

Casey, pitching now in a kind of bewildered anger, gave up a single to DiMaggio. Still Durocher made no move. Charley Keller batted next. Casey got two quick strikes on "King Kong," then indicated how lost he was by trying to slip a third strike past Keller instead of wasting a couple of pitches. Keller hit a line drive off the right field wall for a double and two runs, putting the Yankees in front.

The Dodger pitcher was through now. Shot to pieces. And still Durocher made no move. For once in his life he seemed helpless, as the roof fell in on his team. Casey walked Bill Dickey next. Gordon doubled for two more runs and Rizzuto walked. Finally, to everyone's relief, the Yankee pitcher grounded out to end the nightmare inning.

Four runs had crossed the plate for the Yankees—after three were out. The Dodgers walked up to the plate in their half of the ninth as if in a trance. Three came up and three went down. The Yankees won the game 7-4.

Durocher wisely didn't waste time trying to cheer the Dodgers after this debacle. He knew nothing would help. But before the game the following day he tore into them in the clubhouse.

"I know what you guys are thinking," he snarled at the players. "We're through. Finished. Our luck's run out on us and we don't have a chance. That's because you're all gutless," he said, tearing into them, trying to get them mad at him and at the Yankees at the same time.

But for all of Leo's tireless haranguing in the clubhouse and all through the fifth game, the Dodgers were indeed through. A fighting, clawing, hustling club all year under Durocher's virulent tongue-lashing, the Dodgers were meek as lambs as Ernie Bonham set them down quietly, in the final game, 3-1.

The loss of the World Series, however, couldn't completely tarnish the bright 1941 season for the Dodgers. They had given Brooklyn a pennant for the first time in twenty-one years. They had attracted overflow crowds at home and on the road as the league's most exciting ball team.

As for Leo Durocher, it solidified his place in baseball as a manager of skill and drive. Through the lonely Winter, at least, the Dodgers could console themselves with one thought: but for Russo's drive off Fitzsimmons' knee, and Owen's muff of the third strike on Henrich, the Dodgers might well have been the World Champions, and Durocher the outstanding manager of the year.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



THE 1941 WORLD SERIES had hardly been written into the record books when Pearl Harbor turned the whole world upside down. President Roosevelt expressed his personal desire that baseball continue, but the game's officials were in a quandary. Most of their athletes were draft bait, and they were unsure of the public's reaction to "baseball as usual" when men were dying overseas each day.

For Leo Durocher and Larry MacPhail, the problem was to defend the ball club against the inroads expected to be made by the draft. About the pennant, nobody was worried. Sure, the Dodgers had lost the World Series to the Yankees, but on the breaks. The pennant would be a breeze, a walk in, this year.

The Dodgers' overconfidence was evident in Havana during the 1942 training season. The players waltzed through the warm-up games, their minds on anything but baseball. The Havana night spots were getting a big play from the Dodgers. Everybody was having a good time and the clubhouse rang with laughter. With their blind overconfidence and the "live for today" attitude brought on by the war, the Dodgers were headed straight for trouble.

Still, Brooklyn drove to the top of the league when the season opened, and stayed up there right through the sum-

mer. Durocher was riding the umpires again, and finally was slapped with a three-day suspension for an extended verbal brawl with umpire Tom Dunn.

Hard luck hit the Dodgers in July, when the sensational outfielder Pete Reiser, chasing a fly ball hit by Enos Slaughter of the Cardinals, crashed headlong into the bleacher wall. The unfortunate outfielder, one of the most promising athletes ever to step into a baseball uniform, was never quite the same again.

August came, then September, with the Dodgers still winning. But so were the Cardinals, and Brooklyn couldn't shake the St. Louis club. On September 13th the Dodgers' house of cards collapsed suddenly as they dropped a Sunday double-header to the Reds. The Cardinals meanwhile beat the Phillies and took over the league lead.

The day before the season ended, Larry MacPhail resigned from the Dodgers to accept a commission with the Army. And the Cardinals clinched the pennant.

The teams finished only two games apart, however, and manager Durocher was second-guessed from Canarsie to California for apparently blowing a sure pennant. The criticism stung Leo, but he shrugged his shoulders.

"What the heck," he came back at his detractors, "I can't be as bad a manager as some of these guys make out. We won 104 games, didn't we? What do they want me to do, win 'em all?"

The big question in Brooklyn for 1943 was who would replace Larry MacPhail. Various names bobbed in and out of the newspapers, but league president Ford Frick put in a quiet word that carried the most weight.

Frick recommended to the Dodger owners that they bring in Branch Rickey from St. Louis.

"Rickey will restore order to the Dodgers," Frick told the assembled executives. "Your team is getting the reputation of being nothing but a bunch of gamblers. Newspapermen have complained of being barred from the clubhouse while gamblers and bookmakers were given an open door. Rickey will be a restraining influence on Leo Durocher, too."

The Dodger directors nodded. They were well aware of the ugly situation threatening the Dodger club. But if Durocher and MacPhail had done nothing to stop it—had indeed been part of it—what could they do?

Rickey looked like the answer. The Cardinal executive was known for his complete aversion to gambling in any form, and would put an immediate stop to it. And hadn't Rickey held Durocher in check when Leo was with the Cardinals? Rickey had also proved himself a masterful baseball man at St. Louis, where he initiated baseball's first farm system.

Rickey came on to Brooklyn for the 1943 season. At once he clamped down on the rampant gambling, upbraided Durocher for his part in it and fired coach Charley Dressen for betting on the horses. Dressen was rehired shortly thereafter, however, when he promised to reform.

It was a hectic season for Brooklyn. Durocher was turned down by the Army for a punctured eardrum and in his disappointment he became more irascible than ever. In July Leo got into such a bitter dispute with several of the Dodgers players that they threatened to strike unless he

was fired. But Rickey backed up his manager and the furor quickly died down.

Then the draft began to catch up with baseball in earnest. Durocher had his hands full juggling his line-up, calling on players over draft age or rookies too young to be eligible. Leo even played six games at shortstop himself. But with such Dodger stalwarts as Reese, Reiser and Hugh Casey gone, the Dodgers finished the season third.

For the 1944 season, Rickey released Durocher from his player-manager contract and signed him strictly as a manager.

"Is there anybody else in line for the job?" reporters asked Rickey before Leo was signed.

"I have no one else in mind," said Rickey. "Leo, of course, is a man of many interests. He may decide for himself to seek a career elsewhere."

Rickey was only joking about Durocher's "many interests." His remark was a deliberate reference to Leo's sudden fondness for the California climate and the companionship of Hollywood celebrities. Leo, too, had appeared on several radio shows, where his raspy voice and caustic tongue make him a big hit. It was being rumored around the baseball circuit that Leo was "going Hollywood" in a big way.

That was one time Rickey and the baseball world should have known better. There never was and there never will be any career for Leo Durocher more attractive than his life in baseball. Leo signed his 1944 contract without even asking what his salary would be.

The Dodgers fielded a patchwork team in 1944. Most of the players would have been learning their trade in the minor leagues or long since retired were it not for the war.

It took all of Leo's driving power to urge his motley crew into a gasping, seventh-place finish.

Although Rickey had placed a firm hand on Leo's outside activities, Durocher was a terror during the ball games. He was fighting constantly with the umpires, getting fined and suspended. A picture of Leo "The Lip" arguing with an umpire was an almost daily event in the newspapers. Fans flocked to Ebbets Field just to see Leo in action against the men in blue. That year there was little else to get excited about watching the Dodgers.

Near the end of the 1944 season, Durocher came as close as he ever would be to being fired outright by Branch Rickey. On an off day the Dodgers had scheduled an exhibition game, but Leo didn't show up to manage the club. In fact, he didn't show up at all until the following evening, when a night game was scheduled.

Rickey was seething with rage when he called Leo into his office. He came within an inch of throwing Leo out for good, but after a violent lecture he forgave the manager.

When the chastened Leo had gone, Branch, Jr., who was with the ball club's front office, smiled at his father.

"I knew all along you wouldn't fire Leo, Dad," he said.

Rickey clamped down hard on his inevitable cigar. "You did, eh?" he said. "How did you know?"

"Because Leo is your favorite reclamation project," young Rickey answered. "And if you fired him you'd have to admit defeat."

Rickey smiled. "You're right, son," he said slowly.

The pattern of the war years was repeated in 1945, with castoffs, kids and weary old-timers filling the major league line-ups. Although the Dodgers came in only third, when

the season was over, Eddie Dyer, manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, named the Dodgers as the team to beat in 1946.

Dyer didn't know how right he was. The Cardinals and the Dodgers wound up the 1946 season in a tie for first place. The Dodgers were the team for the Cardinals to beat, all right. And they did exactly that, by taking two straight games in the play-off series that followed.

It was a heartbreaking defeat for Durocher—to be so near another pennant and yet so far. He had worked hard for his team, spent agonizing days and nights figuring the angles, juggling his second-rate team through the war years and getting the most out of it, more probably than any other manager could have.

True, he had fought bitterly with his own men. He would battle with anybody who stood in his way, who didn't play baseball the way he played it, with everything he had. Leo was a poor loser. He admitted it. But if there was anything he hated more than losing, it was the spectacle of one of his own men not trying.

When Leo played the game, he played hard. He fought and hustled and shoved, but he stayed in the majors as a player for fifteen years even though he couldn't hit his weight. And now, when he was in charge, he managed his team the same way. Leo's attitude was never better expressed than it was one day during that exciting 1946 season when he was being needled about his fighting by Dodger radio broadcaster Red Barber.

It was during a series with the Giants at the Polo Grounds, and Barber said to Durocher, "Leo, why don't you be a nice guy for a change?"

Durocher had been reclining on the bench, watching

the Dodgers take batting practice. Now he leaped to his feet.

"A nice guy!" he stormed. "A nice guy!" Listen, Red, I've been around baseball a long time, and I've seen what happens to nice guys." Durocher whirled suddenly and pointed toward the Giant dugout.

"Look over there," he said to Barber. "You ever see a nicer guy than Mel Ott? Or any of the other guys on the Giants? They're the nicest bunch of guys in the world! And where are they? They're in last place!"

Leo paced up and down in front of the Dodger dugout, waving his arms in agitation.

"Look at me. I'm not a nice guy. I'm marked lousy in this league. But I'm in first place. And nobody helped me get up here except the guys on this club. And they're not nice guys, either. There wasn't anybody in this league gave me a hand. They saw me coming and they tried to stomp on me. All the nice guys in this league tried to knock me down—which is the way it should be. But I made it, didn't I? Those nice guys over there are last. Let 'em try and catch me now!"

When the Dodgers were finally caught that year, it was by the Cardinals, a team that fought and played every bit as hard as the Dodgers.

"Wait till next year!" cried the Dodger fans, and with some justification. Next year did look promising for the Dodgers. Many of their stars had returned from the war and were working themselves back into shape. Some of the youngsters who had been brought up prematurely in the emergency had begun to play with polish during the 1946 season.

And a great experiment was in the works. The Dodgers,

led by Branch Rickey, intended to give a serious chance to several Negro ballplayers the following spring. One of the players they were to examine—Jackie Robinson—was to revolutionize baseball by becoming the first Negro to play in the professional leagues, and one of the greatest players ever to wear a baseball uniform.

“Wait till next year!” the Dodger fans cried. What would have been the fans’ reaction had they known in advance the strange twist of events the year 1947 was to bring?

CHAPTER NINETEEN



ONE DAY IN 1942, Leo Durocher was having lunch at the Stork Club in New York City. Several tables away sat the beautiful movie actress Laraine Day, dining with a friend. Durocher, as usual, was popping off about something to the people at his table, and his brassy voice could be heard easily above the conversational hum of the other diners in the room.

Miss Day turned to her escort. "Who is that man?" she asked, annoyed, indicating Leo.

"That's Leo Durocher," replied her friend.

"And who is he?" she asked.

"He's the manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers," came the reply.

"And who are they?" Miss Day asked.

Now it was 1946, and in an airport restaurant Laraine Day was lingering over a cup of coffee while waiting for the plane that was to take her back to Hollywood. Suddenly a familiarly strident voice broke into her thoughts.

"H'ya," said Leo Durocher. "Okay if I sit down?"

"Why—ah—y-yes, you may if you wish," said Laraine, startled.

"You're Laraine Day, right?" said Leo. "I recognized you right away."

Laraine nodded slowly. She was hoping this brash Mr. Durocher would leave her alone. She remembered him as the man with the loud voice whom she had disliked the moment she saw him several years before.

Some of the toughest men in baseball had tried unsuccessfully to discourage Leo Durocher, and Laraine Day didn't stand a chance.

"Say," Leo said to the lovely young actress, "you're not waiting for that Los Angeles plane, are you?"

"Yes, I am. Why do you ask?"

"That's great," exclaimed Leo. "So am I. We can ride all the way together. We'll have a great time."

Had she been able to do so gracefully, Laraine would have fled from the restaurant at once. The thought of traveling three thousand miles with this ill-mannered ballplayer was far from appealing. But there was no polite way out for her.

It was quite a plane ride, for both Leo Durocher and Laraine Day. As Leo chattered incessantly into the trapped girl's ear, he found himself liking the quiet softness of her beauty and manner. And Laraine, to her shocked surprise, was being favorably drawn toward this strange, confident, presumptuous personality.

Before the trip had ended, Leo decided he was in love. And Laraine had determined that Leo Durocher was the man she was going to marry.

When the plane landed at Los Angeles Airport, Leo turned to the smiling actress hesitantly. He was a little unsure of himself with this demure young lady. "Um—ah—say, would it be okay if I called you some night?" he asked anxiously. "We could go to dinner or to a night club, what-

ever you say. I could get a nice, quiet table for us somewhere. I'm pretty well known around Hollywood, you know," he said, eager to impress her.

Laraine suppressed a smile. She was pretty well known around Hollywood herself. "I think that will be all right," she said.

Durocher was so overjoyed he rushed into the nearest phone booth and called Branch Rickey in New York.

"Branch!" he yelled into the phone. "I'm in love!"

"You're what!" exclaimed Rickey.

"I'm in love!" cried Leo. "Wait till you meet her, Branch. This kid is great. I never met a girl like her before. She's even too good for me."

"Fine, Leo. I'm glad to hear it," Rickey said. He knew that Leo had dissolved his second marriage the year before. He hoped that perhaps this time marriage would prove to be the right tonic for Durocher. Suddenly an unpleasant thought came to Rickey's mind.

"Say, Leo," he said casually, "where are you going to be staying while you're on the coast?"

"Where I always stay," came back Durocher, mentioning the name of a certain high-flying actor. "You know that."

"That's what I thought," Rickey said heavily. "I was under the impression you knew you were supposed to keep away from him."

"Ah, he's a good guy, Branch," said Durocher. "What's wrong with staying with him for a couple of weeks?"

He may be a fine actor and a perfect gentleman for all I know," Rickey replied. "But he and some of his close friends have been involved in gambling activities, to put it

politely. You know that, Leo. You've been warned about it many times. These men are not fit companions for the manager of a major league baseball team."

"Don't worry, Branch," Leo insisted. "I'll watch myself."

Rickey was shaking his head when he hung up the phone. No, this would not do. Leo apparently was not taking seriously the warnings about his careless associations. Stronger measures would be needed. Rickey called in one of his trusted assistants and told him of the conversation with Leo.

"We've got to hit Leo hard this time," Rickey said. "I want you to go to Commissioner Chandler's office in Cincinnati. Tell him what we're up against with Leo. Be discreet, of course, but honest with the commissioner."

Rickey's assistant hesitated. "This may hurt Leo. Chandler may get rough."

Rickey shook his head. "Not if we present it to him like this. We've got to take the risk, anyway. It's for Leo's benefit as well as our own. If he's not stopped soon, the time will come when warnings will be too late."

The next day, at the office of the baseball commissioner, Rickey's assistant outlined the situation to Happy Chandler. "We believe an official reprimand and warning to Durocher—quietly, without publicity—coming from you, Commissioner, would have an immediate effect on curbing Leo. Mr. Rickey feels Durocher must be made to realize that all his difficulties result from his questionable associations off the field of baseball."

"Is Mr. Rickey making an official complaint against Durocher?" asked Chandler.

"No, not at all. Mr. Rickey sincerely believes that Durocher could be made into a solid, responsible baseball manager. His ability is outstanding. Mr. Rickey has often remarked on Leo's courage in winning success in baseball despite the constant opposition against him.

"The Dodgers would simply like you to tell Leo emphatically that he is to sever his connections at once with anyone who might be regarded as undesirable. And I have with me a list of such persons which you may give to Durocher."

Chandler immediately reached for his phone and put in a call to Durocher in California. Leo seemed disturbed by the call.

"Is anything wrong, Commissioner?" he asked anxiously.

"Durocher," the commissioner said, "I want you to meet me at the Oakland golf course on Friday. I want to talk to you."

"Gee, that's a tough day," said Leo. "I've got some important business appointments on Friday. Can't we make it next week sometime?"

"Friday," said Chandler. "At eleven o'clock. Be there."

On the fairway of the Oakland Golf Club Commissioner Happy Chandler laced into Leo Durocher. He took from his jacket pocket a list of names.

"The time has come," said Chandler, "for you to choose between your so-called friends and baseball, Leo. Your associations have long been a source of irritation to the commissioner's office. Even before I took over, Judge Landis had warned you.

"This is your final warning," Chandler went on. "You

are to keep away from every person on this list—completely. And you can start right now by moving to a hotel.”

Durocher shook his head and sighed. “Okay, Commissioner. I’ll do as you say. Some of those fellows will be calling me names, but I’ll do it. I’ll stay clear of all of them.”

Leo was as good as his word, and a week later Branch Rickey signed him to his 1947 contract, at what was reportedly the highest salary ever guaranteed a baseball manager.

And on January 21, 1947, Leo Durocher and Laraine Day were married. Irrelevant as it seemed at the time, that day was to be one of the most important milestones in the baseball career of Leo Durocher.

The furor over Durocher’s behavior had quieted down considerably by the time the Dodgers arrived in March for their spring training at Havana, Cuba. Leo, determined to steer clear of trouble and undoubtedly worried about Chandler’s warning, lived in virtual seclusion in his Havana hotel room. In a city where gambling is legal, Leo was afraid he’d run into some of his forbidden acquaintances, who were frequent visitors to the island.

Laraine Day, his recent bride, was of tremendous help to him. She was Leo’s unheralded public relations counselor. The sweet-mannered girl charmed whomever she met, and her quiet, reserved conduct began to rub off on Durocher. He was a model citizen in Havana.

Then came the debacle. One day, during an exhibition game in Havana with the Yankees, Branch Rickey spotted two men he said were known gamblers sitting in one of

the Yankee boxes near Yankee executive Larry MacPhail, Rickey's predecessor with the Dodgers.

"How do you like that!" Rickey stormed to the sports writers. "Can you imagine what would happen to Durocher if those men were seen sitting with him?"

The sports writers didn't have to answer. They knew as well as Rickey what the consequences would have been. They called the attention of Leo to the two men sitting near MacPhail. Durocher's reaction was immediate and violent.

"Brother, all I'd have to do is nod my head to those guys and Chandler would throw me out of baseball so fast I wouldn't know what hit me! But MacPhail can invite them into his box and get away with it!"

When the story broke in the newspapers MacPhail hit back at the Dodgers. He denied that the two men were his guests. He maintained that their presence in his box was a coincidence. Someone unknown to him had given them the tickets. MacPhail was so incensed over the charges and the attendant fuss that he demanded that Commissioner Chandler call a hearing to thresh out the matter.

Chandler agreed, and a hearing was held immediately in Sarasota, Florida. Accusations and counteraccusations flew back and forth at the meetings with Chandler, but the entire affair seemed to be going around in circles. Nothing was proved, no problems resolved, no action taken. When the hearings ended, the situation remained hanging in the air.

Rickey, Durocher and the rest of the Dodger staff flew back to Havana, where other problems awaited them. Jackie

Robinson, the first Negro to play in organized baseball, had had a sensational year at Montreal in 1946. Now he was ready to move up to the Dodgers. Rickey and Durocher wanted him. The Dodgers needed him. But would the players, and baseball in general, make room for him?

"It's a ticklish problem," Durocher said to Rickey as their plane circled the Havana airport. "We're going to have our hands full."

Compared to the tempest that was to break over Leo's head in the coming weeks, the Robinson situation was a picnic.

CHAPTER TWENTY



IT WAS APRIL 9, 1947. Spring and baseball were in the Brooklyn air, with the opening game just a week away. In the Dodger offices on Montague Street Branch Rickey, Leo Durocher, Branch Rickey, Jr., traveling secretary Harold Parrott and the three Dodger coaches were going over the club's roster, trying to come up with a winning combination.

Rickey, a cigar in his teeth, tilted back in his upholstered swivel chair and turned to Durocher. "Well, what do you think, Leo?" he asked.

Durocher nodded. "Bring up Robinson now, Branch," he said. "He's ready. And we need him. If we had had him playing for us last year the Cards wouldn't have even come close to us. He'll be the big difference this time."

Rickey beamed. "I'm happy to hear you talk that way, Leo."

Durocher's eyes blazed. "How else did you expect me to talk? Did you think I'd care about the color of a man's skin if he could play baseball the way Robinson does? The boy is sensational! What do I care if he's a Negro?"

The Dodger coaches voiced their agreement.

Rickey looked at his aides. He was gratified and proud to be surrounded by such men. "How about the players?" he asked.

Durocher's answer was shut off by the ringing of the telephone. Rickey turned in annoyance and picked up the receiver. "Hello!" he barked, then, "Oh, I see." As Rickey listened in silence, he began chewing his cigar viciously, his eyes flashing. The others seemed to sense this was no ordinary phone call. Something was up.

Rickey hung up slowly and turned to his staff. His face was white as chalk, his voice strained and unnatural. "Harold," he nodded at Parrott, "Commissioner Chandler has fined you five hundred dollars for writing and talking."

Parrott jerked up in his chair, shocked beyond belief. True, in the hearings at Sarasota Larry MacPhail had complained of Parrott's articles in the Brooklyn *Eagle* about the Havana affair, but the commissioner had talked as if he were willing to forget all about the story.

Everybody in the room started to talk at once, but Rickey silenced them with a wave of his hand.

"Commissioner Chandler has fined me, too," he said, "and the Yankees. Fined us two thousand dollars."

As this news sank in, the men looked at one another. Something in Rickey's tone hinted at more drastic news to come. They shifted uneasily and anxiously in their chairs.

Rickey swung his chair around and faced Durocher. He leaned forward. "Leo," he said quietly, "the commissioner has suspended you from baseball for one year."

The hush in the room lasted a full minute. Then Durocher recovered enough to stammer, "A year—what for?"

"For conduct detrimental to baseball."

It had happened. After years of walking on thin ice, Leo had finally fallen through. The flare up in Havana and the hearings in Sarasota had done it.

When word of Leo's suspension reached the public, the uproar was terrific. Peculiarly, Leo found himself in the unusual position of having sentiment on his side. Thousands of baseball fans, who had once been against Leo, now spoke up for him. The newspapers were almost unanimous in their condemnation of Chandler's action.

Leo was no angel, they wrote, but the penalty was much too severe. Fans and writers and broadcasters poured out their wrath on the Durocher ban, but the order stood, and there was no comment from Leo. Along with the suspension, Chandler had ordered that all parties included in the discussion "would be hereinafter silenced."

There was nothing for Leo to do but say good-by to the team. On the day of Chandler's fateful telephone call, Leo went back to his hotel and shut himself in his room. He ordered the telephone disconnected. The rest of the afternoon and all through that lonely night he remained by himself, thinking, pacing the floor, wondering, worrying.

After a sleepless night, Leo dressed—more conservatively than usual—and went directly to the Dodger clubhouse. The players grew quiet when he walked in. Leo merely nodded a reply to their hushed greetings and stepped into his office. He was shocked for a moment when he realized that it wasn't his office any more. Then he turned and walked out to face the assembled players.

He spoke quietly and earnestly to each one in turn, as he shook hands and said good-by.

"Pee Wee . . . Gil . . . Eddie . . . Kirby . . ." He went down the line, giving each of his boys a firm handclasp, a pat on the back. Then he addressed all of them, heartbreak in his voice.

"Fellows," Leo began, then swallowed hard before continuing. "Fellows, I'm sorry I can't be with you again this season. I don't think I have to tell you how sorry. You're all my boys and I'll miss you. This is my team, the kind of team that I'll be proud of as long as I live. I just want you to remember this—you're a good ball club. You can go all the way, win the flag. I'd like that, more than I can tell you. Do that much for me, fellows. For me and Rickey. Trust the boss. He's behind you all the way. Go to him if you need help. He'll see you through.

"Well, that's about all I want to say," Leo sighed. "Just . . . thanks. Thanks for everything you've given me these wonderful years together. For the honor of knowing you, for just—everything. It's been great," he said, his voice choking. With that he wheeled and strode quickly to the door.

Then he turned. The tears streamed freely from his eyes now, glistening on his wet cheeks, and his voice broke completely as he spoke. "I'd like you all to know . . . that wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, I'll be thinking of you. And pulling for you." Then he was gone.

The silence in the room was heavy with emotion. The players stood there, swallowing hard, misty eyed. For the moment they felt lost. Then they stumbled out onto the field to play ball.

Leo and Laraine slipped quietly out of New York to their home in California. Leo had to forget about baseball for the time being.

Forget? Could he forget about three-quarters of his life? Put completely out of his mind twenty-five years of eating, drinking and sleeping baseball? Could he forget

baseball in his California home, three thousand miles from Brooklyn? He walked into his den and stared moodily at the pictures on the walls, pictures of Leo and Miller Huggins, Leo and Lou Gehrig with the World Champion Yankces, Leo and the Gashouse Gang, Leo and the Dodgers.

He never tired of his little refreshment bar made of baseball bats and stools with legs of bats and seats of real catchers' mitts. There were even trophy baseballs cut in half and studded into the bar front. Could he live with these reminders every day and forget about baseball? They'd have to cut out his heart first.

The 1947 baseball season opened. Jackie Robinson had been brought up to the Dodgers. Burt Shotton had been brought out of retirement to manage the club. In California Leo brooded silently, following the events daily in the newspapers.

One night Leo was sitting as usual in the Durocher living room, slumped in an easy chair, staring at nothing, saying nothing. Across the room his beautiful wife Laraine, who had been patiently watching Leo torture himself in silence for a week, came to a sudden decision.

"Leo," she said quietly.

Leo grunted.

"Leo," she repeated softly, "let's talk."

"Sure, honey," Leo said flatly. "What should we talk about?"

"You know, Leo," she said. "About you—and baseball. And us."

Durocher smiled wryly. "Baseball? What's that, a new parlor game?"

"Please, Leo," Laraine said, softly but urgently. "This isn't going to do you any good, moping around, full of resentment inside. What difference does it make now whether what happened was right or wrong? It's done. You've got to face it, talk about it."

Leo was silent for a while. Then he said slowly, "Maybe you're right, Laraine, maybe it doesn't make any difference whether it's right or wrong. But why me, Laraine? Why me?" He shook his head, bewildered.

"What did I ever do that was wrong for baseball, except maybe fight harder than the other guy to win? Was that wrong? Tell me, Laraine, was I wrong to want to win so much . . . so that I would stop at nothing?"

"There's more to it than just your fighting and arguing, Leo. You know that," his wife said.

"What was it, then?" Leo asked, excited now. "My friends? My undesirable associations? So I palled around with a few movie actors while I was in Hollywood—guys accused of placing a bet now and then. So what? That's their business. But I never bet with 'em—never even saw 'em gamble, for that matter," Leo snorted. "All I ever did was say hello and good-by half the time, but everybody had me down as being their best friend.

"No, I got a raw deal, honey," Leo finished. "I'm not saying I never made any mistakes and didn't deserve some punishment. But this is slow death—and I can't take it."

They both were silent for a moment. Then Laraine said, "You know, Leo, despite this terrible business, one thing doesn't seem to have gotten across to you."

"What's that?"

"You still seem to have the feeling that it's no one's affair whom your friends are outside of baseball."

"You're right, that's exactly how I feel," said Leo. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Leo," Laraine said patiently, "I'm an actress and I think I know how you feel about this. It isn't easy to see why the people you associate with should have anyone else's approval. But I've learned to understand and accept that very situation, Leo, and so have most people in Hollywood."

"You see, in our professions we're special people. Myself as an actress, you as the manager of a baseball team. Behavior that is perfectly natural and would go unnoticed in others isn't always acceptable for us. We're public property, in a way. We're expected to set certain standards. Maybe it's unfair to put us in such a position, but nobody forced us to become what we are, Leo. We chose our professions. We're very fortunate to have been able to choose our way of life, and now we have to live up to it."

Leo looked at his lovely wife as if he were seeing her now for the first time. "Thanks, honey," he said. "I guess I needed that. You know, Miller Huggins said something like that to me when I first came up with the Yankees. I started spraying money around like I was printing it myself, really living high. 'Leo,' he said to me, 'it's like you're living in a great big goldfish bowl. Somebody's always watching what you're doing.' I guess I should have listened to old Hug. He was always right."

"It's true, Leo," Laraine said. "And once you've learned that, and accepted it, living it becomes much easier. Re-

member, darling," she added, "in your case, those watching you closest are the millions of youngsters in the country who love baseball, and to whom men like yourself are heroes. You've got to give them something worth while to live up to."

Leo laughed mirthlessly. "We may be doing a lot of talking for nothing, you know," he said. "I may be through in baseball."

"Oh, Leo," Laraine said anxiously, "they wouldn't do that to you, would they?"

Leo shrugged. "I don't know what the score is, honey. Branch indicated I could have my job back when the suspension is over. And while I've got a lot of faith in Rickey, the other stockholders may put too much pressure on him." He shook his head. "I just don't know."

"What will you do, Leo?"

"Who knows?" he said. Then he laughed shortly. "I did pretty well on radio—maybe I'll become a comedian or something. I should be good for a few laughs."

"Leo, please be serious," Laraine begged.

Durocher smiled wryly. "Serious? Serious?" he repeated. "Honey, if I was any more serious I'd bust out crying."

"Oh, Leo. I'm so sorry."

"Don't be," he said. "At least not too sorry. I asked for it, I guess. Now all I can do is sweat it out. And hope for the best."

She came over to him then, and sat on the arm of his chair. "Baseball means a lot to you," she said softly.

"Honey, next to you and little Chris," Leo said,

referring to the Durochers' adopted son, "baseball is my whole life."

Laraine slipped her arm around her husband's shoulders. "It's going to be a difficult year for you, darling."

"It's going to be murder," Leo said.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE



ON DECEMBER 5, 1947, a terse announcement was released to the press by the Dodgers.

"The 1947 contract of Leo Durocher has been renewed for 1948 by the Brooklyn Baseball Club.—Branch Rickey."

When Durocher's suspension was over, Rickey had refused to abandon his principles, even in the face of tremendous pressure, and rehired Durocher to manage the Dodgers.

Leo found himself on quite a spot in taking over a Dodger team that had won the 1947 pennant under the popular Burt Shotton. If the Dodgers won the flag again, well, that was to be expected. If they lost, critics would say he ruined a great club.

Durocher was welcomed back to Brooklyn as his old irascible self, ready for trouble, the familiar chip on his shoulder. But Leo's old self was buried under the rose bushes he had planted in his California garden during his suspension.

Leo Durocher didn't feel like fighting. Certainly, he wasn't looking for trouble. All he wanted to do was manage his ball club and live quietly, as he had learned to do under his beautiful bride's guidance.

There was only one way Leo could redeem himself in

Brooklyn. He had to win not only the pennant, but the World Series, too. This was the one thing Shotton's Dodgers hadn't been able to accomplish the year before against the Yankees.

Leo set out to see what he could do, but things rapidly grew impossible for him in Brooklyn. His pitching staff collapsed. Jackie Robinson, a sensation in his rookie year, reported overweight and couldn't get into shape. Eddie Stanky had been a salary holdout and was traded to Boston. And to make matters worse, attendance took a nose dive at Ebbets Field.

The Dodgers floundered in sixth place and just couldn't get going. Leo waited to be fired. But Branch Rickey, slow at firing managers, was hoping Durocher would resign. Not that Rickey had suddenly lost faith in Durocher, but the howling of the fans had reached the ears of the stockholders. Here was a pennant-winning team morassed in the depths of the second division! A change would have to be made.

The stalemate remained. Leo didn't feel it necessary to resign, nor did he sense that Rickey was hoping for it. Rickey, on the other hand, didn't want to fire Leo, fearing it would be the end of the baseball line for his "favorite reclamation project."

Who knows how the situation would have been resolved if an outside force hadn't saved everyone from further embarrassment.

On the morning of July 15th, league president Ford Frick phoned Rickey and asked him to come to his office that afternoon. Horace Stoneham, president of the Giants, had a matter to discuss with him.

Rickey hurried over to the National League offices in Radio City and found the Giants' owner waiting for him. After shaking hands and exchanging pleasant generalities, Stoneham got down to business.

"Branch, Mel Ott has resigned as manager of the Giants," he said to Rickey.

Rickey removed the cigar from his mouth. "Officially?" he asked.

Stoneham patted his jacket. "I have his resignation here in my pocket. And I'd like to know whether Burt Shotton is available to manage the Giants."

Rickey pondered silently for a minute. "I'll tell you, Horace," he said finally, "I don't honestly think I'd like to let Burt go. It's no secret that we're having a little trouble in our organization, and I need Shotton more than ever where he is, keeping an eye on our minor league talent.

"No, I'm sorry, Horace," Rickey shook his head. "I'd like to help you out, but I wouldn't want to let Shotton go."

"How about Durocher?" Stoneham shot right back.

Rickey's shaggy eyebrows flew up. "You'd be interested in Leo?"

Stoneham nodded. "Very much so."

Rickey puffed his cigar energetically. "Very well, you have my permission to talk to Durocher. I'll have him flown back to New York immediately."

The next day a bewildered and apprehensive Durocher sat alone with Branch Rickey in the Dodgers' Montague Street office.

"I had a rather interesting meeting with Horace Stoneham yesterday, Leo," Rickey said, easing into the discussion.

Durocher waited silently for Rickey to go on.

"He asked me if you were available to manage the Giants." Rickey dropped the bombshell quietly.

"What did you tell him?" Durocher inquired evenly.

"I told him he has my permission to discuss it with you."

"Does that mean that I'm fired?" Leo spat.

Rickey blinked. He took out a fresh cigar, lit it, blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling. "No, it doesn't mean that at all." He said to Durocher. "But it may well be, Leo, that there's a better future for you with the Giants. I know the agony you're going through here in Brooklyn. You're in an impossible position. With the Giants, you will have a new challenge, a fresh start. And perhaps a great deal more security."

"That's all I wanted to hear, Branch," Leo said, rising from his chair. He shook hands with Rickey. "I'll call you as soon as I get through talking to Horace Stoneham."

In the Manhattan apartment of the Durochers, Laraine was listening faithfully to the broadcast of the Dodger game, when Leo phoned her.

"Two men will be dropping by the apartment soon, honey," he said. "Just make them comfortable until I get there. I'll be home soon."

"Who—" she started, but Leo had already hung up.

As she replaced the phone, Laraine suddenly realized that Leo had been calling her locally. What in the world was he doing in New York when the Dodgers were in Cincinnati? A cold fear swept over her. Was Leo in trouble again? What was it this time?

Her thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of the

doorbell, and she admitted two men who looked vaguely familiar to her. They introduced themselves as she led them into the comfortable living room.

"I'm Horace Stoneham, president of the New York Giants," said one of the men, "and this is Garry Schumacher, my assistant." Both men seemed to be in a jovial mood.

"Leo told me to expect visitors," said Laraine, looking inquiringly from one to the other. "But he didn't say who. He'll be along in a minute. Meanwhile may I offer you gentlemen something?"

"Well," said Stoneham, beaming. "I guess we ought to have a little something to celebrate the occasion, eh, Garry?"

Laraine appeared more puzzled than ever. "Celebration? Occasion?"

"Yes!" boomed Schumacher. "After all, Leo's going to be the new manager of the Giants!"

Laraine's mouth flew open. "Manager of the Giants!" she exclaimed. Then she laughed. "Then what am I listening to *this* game for?" she said, and switched off the Dodger game.

The roar that came from Giant fans when the news was announced nearly blew down the Polo Grounds. Durocher, manager of the Giants! They couldn't have been more shocked had Leo been named Commissioner of Baseball. All their lives Giant followers had learned to hate the Dodgers, Leo Durocher most of all. Now they were being asked to accept him as manager in place of their favorite, Mel Ott. It was too much.

The Giant fans muttered under their breath the rest of the 1948 season as Leo brought a poor Giant team home in fifth place. There was nothing much Leo could have done with the team that year. This was a Giant team that set a major league record by swatting 221 home runs in 1947, yet finished fourth. The Giant office couldn't help but think a team like this was a potential pennant winner. Leo, coming on in the middle of the 1948 season, had to go along with the players he had inherited from Mel Ott. This team was a slow-moving aggregation, and Leo's idea of a baseball team was exactly the opposite.

Though Durocher's relationship with Stoneham was a cordial one, he might have had a short life at the Polo Grounds had he not been inadvertently helped out by Commissioner Happy Chandler.

Chandler's first unwitting move in Leo's behalf was fining the Giant manager five hundred dollars for "tampering" with Freddie Fitzsimmons. This was in connection with Fitz's move from the Braves to the Giants as a coach. Since Leo appeared to be completely innocent of the charges, many fans and sports writers began to suspect that Chandler was using Leo as a whipping boy.

Then, in April of 1949, with the new season barely under way, Chandler suspended Leo without a hearing when a fan claimed Leo punched and kicked him after a game with the Dodgers.

The clamor that rose on Durocher's behalf was amazing. Chandler was roundly criticized in the press for suspending Leo before all the evidence was in. As it turned out, Durocher was completely cleared of the charges. By that time, however, Leo had found himself cast in the

strange role of a hero to the baseball public. In the typical way Americans have of rallying to the side of an underdog, people from all over the country had hopped on the Durocher band wagon.

When Leo appeared at the Polo Grounds, where his welcome had been anything but cordial until then, he received a standing ovation from the crowd.

A subdued Durocher later told reporters he had never felt such gratitude before in his life. His sudden acceptance by the Giant fans, and the general rush to his defense against Chandler, had a marked and lasting effect on Durocher. It was if he realized for the first time in his baseball career that it wasn't Leo Durocher against the world any more.

A little more sure of himself in a Giant uniform by now, and armed with the argument of another fifth-place finish in 1949, Leo had it out with Stoneham. There were plenty of changes he wanted to make in the Giant line-up. Again Leo told Stoneham, "This isn't my kind of team." And this time he won his point.

In one of the biggest trades baseball had seen in many years, the Giants sent Sid Gordon, Willard Marshall, Buddy Kerr and Sam Webb to Boston in exchange for Eddie Stanky and Alvin Dark. Leo was shedding some of the awesome Giant power—which had gotten them nowhere—for a couple of fast-moving, sure-fielding ballplayers.

Before he knew what struck him, Leo was back on the spot. He had traded away some of the most popular players in Giant uniform. Fans and writers alike called the deal a colossal blunder. And when the 1950 season opened at the Polo Grounds, with the Boston Braves winning three

straight from the Giants, the fans began snapping at Leo's heels again.

But being on the spot was old stuff to Durocher. He could handle this kind of criticism. He rode the team hard, alternately praising them and needling them. But he was convinced he had made the smart move. By midseason he finally had the Giants winning, and the boos turned to faint cheers.

Still driving hard, the Giants moved up the ladder. They were sixth in June, fifth in July and August and fourth going in to September. Putting on a rousing finish, Durocher brought the Giants into third place, and the Polo Grounds resounded to the cheers and applause for the Giants and their manager.

With his heart and his skill, with his determination not to back down when he felt he was in the right, Leo had gained the respect and admiration of the Polo Grounds regulars. As the Giants roared into their whirlwind finish, the fans flocked back to Coogan's Bluff to hail the man they had shunned two short years ago.

And Durocher had begun to build his kind of team. Pitchers Sal Maglie and Jim Hearn had joined the pitching staff. There were Al Dark and Eddie Stanky. Henry Thompson, the first Negro to play with the Giants, was on third. And in June, another Negro player had been acquired for future delivery. It didn't get much attention in the press at the time. Nobody but Negro baseball fans had heard of him. He was bought from the Birmingham Black Barons and sent to Trenton. His name was Willie Mays.

The future looked bright for the Giants and Leo Durocher, brighter than it had been for a long, long time.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO



THE NEW YORK GIANTS have a long and colorful history in the National League, while in both leagues Leo Durocher's career has been exciting and flamboyant, but neither ever had a season more incredible than the one of 1951.

Significantly, the Giants went through their spring training that year at the Yankee-owned Miller Huggins Field, in St. Petersburg, Florida. It couldn't help but have an effect on Durocher. Here he was, manager of a major league team, training on the field named after his own first major league manager, Miller Huggins—the beloved Huggins, the only man Leo respected as a fresh rookie breaking in with the Yankees, the only man who liked Leo and helped him, tried to guide and encourage him.

A more appropriate prelude could not have been planned deliberately for the strange play that was about to unfold.

The curtain rose on the 1951 season with a promising note for the Giants, as Larry Jansen shut out the Boston Braves, 4-0. It was like the false calm before a terrible storm. The Giants didn't win another game until April 30th. Eleven games in a row they lost, while the fans screamed and the writers predicted the second division for the Giants.

On April 30th Sal Maglie and Sheldon "Available" Jones combined to beat the Dodgers, and Durocher breathed easier. But not much easier. He still had serious problems, notably at first base, where the inept Monte Irvin stood out like a sore thumb. In desperation, Leo put Irvin back in the outfield, his original position, and brought Whitey Lockman in from the outfield to play first base.

This was also in the nature of a dangerous experiment for Durocher. Lockman had tried to switch from the outfield to first base during spring training, and his efforts had been disastrous. But there was nothing else for Leo to do. Irvin was actually afraid of the swift throws that came blazing to him from across the diamond. And although Lockman wasn't much of an improvement, at least he tried, and eventually became a standout performer at the bag for the Giants.

On May 24th Willie Mays was called up from Minneapolis. Mays, a nineteen-year-old grinning kid with a pleasant, childlike innocence, broke in with a loud thud. He got one hit in his first twenty-six times at bat, an inauspicious beginning for a man who was soon to be called a baseball miracle—a DiMaggio, Musial and Ty Cobb all rolled into one.

But Willie straightened out, started hitting. And his fielding was amazing to behold. One of the greatest plays he ever made, one that was always to be mentioned later in discussions about Mays, was at the expense of the Dodgers.

With one out and Brooklyn's speedy Billy Cox on third base, the batter stroked a long, high drive to right center. Mays was off at the crack of the bat, caught the ball while running at full speed toward the wall, made a complete

spin and in the same motion threw Cox out at the plate.

It was such an unbelievable play that it took the fans a moment to realize what Mays had done. Then they let out a roar of acclaim as Willie, grinning broadly, trotted in to the bench.

Several days later, while Durocher was talking enthusiastically to the sports writers about Mays, one of them interrupted him.

"I heard that you said you wouldn't trade Mays for anybody else in baseball. Do you really mean anybody?"

"That's right," acknowledged Leo. "I wouldn't trade Willie for Musial, DiMaggio, Williams—anybody you want to name. Remember, Mays is only nineteen. Before he's through with baseball he'll become one of the greatest of all time. He's a natural."

The Giants began a steady climb upward in May. From last place they rose gradually to the first division. On May 27th, three days after Willie Mays reported, they finally went above the .500 mark when pitcher Sal Maglie beat the Phillies with a brilliant two-hit game. Leo started getting the kind of pitching he needed now. Besides Maglie, Larry Jansen and Jim Hearn were turning in standout performances, and George Spencer was holding up the relief pitching.

Early in July, Durocher made the third of his masterminding moves, and it turned out to be a key one. He installed outfielder Bobby Thomson at third base, and the Flying Scot took hold. The Giant infield was set then, with Lockman and Thomson, Alvin Dark and Eddie Stanky. It certainly was a Durocher-built infield.

Steadily, through July and August, the Giants pounded

To win the pennant was expected of them, to lose after holding such a commanding lead would be a calamity of awful proportions in Brooklyn.

The Dodger lead was cut to three games . . . two and a half . . . two. Back up to three and Giant fans groaned. Two again. One. Two—then one again. Then they were tied, with one game to go!

On the final day of the season, the Dodgers would be taking on the Phillies while the Giants played Boston. Would the pennant be decided, or would this heart-stopping season go on to a final, nerve-racking play-off series?

The Giants, continuing their sensational play, beat the Braves, 3-2, and the scoreboard showed the Phillies beating Brooklyn. In the Giant clubhouse no one bothered to dress as the players gathered around the radio to listen to the play-by-play of the Dodger game.

In the ninth inning the Dodgers, exhibiting some of their own mettle, tied the score. The game went into the tenth, the eleventh, the twelfth. The tension was unbearable. The pennant hung on every pitch. Finally the Dodgers broke through in the fourteenth inning and won the game. The season had ended in a tie!

No series—not even a World Series—ever generated more excitement in New York than the Giant-Dodger play-offs in 1951. It seemed as if every radio and television set in the city was tuned in to the ball games. Dignified Wall Street offices and haughty Madison Avenue shops rented television sets for the occasion. Car radios blared out the progress of the game on every street. “Hey, Mac,

what's the score?" was the constant concern of nail-chewing millions.

The first game was played at Ebbets Field on October 1st, with Jim Hearn pitching masterfully to beat Ralph Branca, 3-1. Giant fans were jubilant.

But the next day the Dodgers demonstrated the terrific power that had terrorized the league during the regular season. As Clem Labine blanked the Giants with six hits, the Dodgers walloped Sheldon Jones and Al Corwin for ten runs and thirteen hits, including four home runs. Jackie Robinson, Gil Hodges, Andy Pafko and Rube Walker hit for the distance.

The spirits of the Giants fans sank. The Dodgers had too much, they felt. It was miracle enough that they had been forced into a play-off. To expect the Giants to take it all was too much.

And that's exactly how things looked the next day in the final game. Dodger ace Don Newcombe faced Sal Maglie, and Brooklyn, behind the powerful hurling of Big Newk, eased into the last of the ninth inning leading 4-1. Giant fans dejectedly headed for the Polo Grounds' exits. Gleeful Dodger rooters were slapping each other on the back and shaking hands.

Al Dark led off the bottom half of the ninth for the Giants. The count went to one ball and two strikes. Then Dark singled past Gil Hodges into right field. Don Mueller, a pesky place-hitter like Dark, followed with another single to right and Dark raced to third.

The crowd moving toward the exits stopped. Dodger fans looked anxiously at each other. Were the Giants going

to pull another one of their patented ninth inning rallies, the way they had all year?

Monte Irvin, a long-ball hitter, was up, representing the tying run. Big Don Newcombe bore down hard. He shot in a fast ball for a strike. Then a big curve broke over the plate. Strike two. Newk was ahead of his man. He wasted one—outside. Again the blazing fast ball. Irvin swung and lifted a high, twisting foul near the first base seats. Over for it went Hodges and grabbed it for the first out.

Durocher walked to the end of the bench and took a long drink from the water cooler. He called a few words of encouragement to Whitey Lockman as the first baseman strode to the plate. The next moment the Polo Grounds was in an uproar as Lockman doubled to left. Dark scored and Mueller raced to third. The score was now 4-2, with the tying runs in scoring position and only one out. Time was called for a moment as Clint Hartung was sent in to run for Mueller, who had twisted his ankle sliding into third.

Dodger manager Charley Dressen looked out at his bull pen. Newcombe had suddenly lost his stuff. Dressen waved for his young right-hander Ralph Branca to come on to pitch to Bobby Thomson. It was a decision that was to be talked about around the baseball world for years to come.

The former New York University ace Ralph Branca took his warm-up pitches from the mound and signaled that he was ready. The stands were quiet. It was said later that business virtually came to a halt in New York City while Branca pitched to Bobby Thomson.

The lanky right-hander took a look at the base runner and delivered the first pitch to Thomson. Fast ball down the middle, strike one. Branca took the return toss from the catcher and stepped back on the mound. Again he looked over his shoulder at the runners. They represented the tying runs. Thomson, at the plate, was the winning run. The run that meant the pennant.

With a two-run lead and runners on second and third, Branca took a full windup and came down with another fast ball. Thomson set himself and swung with everything he had. A shout went up as Thomson connected solidly, and the ball sailed on a swiftly rising line to deep left field. The Dodger fielder raced desperately to the wall, then watched helplessly as the ball crashed into the left field seats for a home run! The Giants had won, 5-4—the pennant was theirs!

For a second there was stunned silence in the Polo Grounds, then a mighty roar that grew until a deafening crescendo of sound shook the rafters of the grandstand as Thomson rounded the bases behind Hartung and Lockman. Pandemonium raged throughout New York. It looked like New Year's Eve and the end of the war put together. Hardened baseball writers leaned out of the press box and cheered. Nobody had ever seen anything like it. Durocher and Stanky wrestled along the third base line. The players pummeled each other and pounded Thomson's back until it was red and sore. Even the umpires managed a smile. The Dodgers, forgotten men, walked slowly off the field.

"The most famous home run ever hit," and "The home run heard 'round the world" was how the sports writers described Thomson's blow the next day. They all agreed

it was the most exciting baseball game they had ever seen in their lives.

In the hysterical tumult of the fantastic Giant victory, the coming World Series with the Yankees was all but forgotten. To many observers, anything that happened in the Series would only be an anticlimax, anyway.

The Giants were a hot ball club, and they opened the Series at Yankee Stadium by beating the favored Yankees, 5-1. The drums started beating now for a World Championship for the Giants. But the Yankees came back the next day behind pitcher Eddie Lopat and beat the Giants, 3-1.

The Series switched to the Polo Grounds for the third game, and the Giants knocked Yankee ace Vic Raschi out of the box in the fifth inning, winning the game, 6-2. The World Series stood now at two games to one, in favor of the Giants. The next day it rained.

Whether the day off cooled the blazing Giants, or whether the natural letdown following the tension of the pennant race finally caught up with them is impossible to say. But they didn't win another game from the Yankees.

In the fourth game Allie Reynolds topped Sal Maglie, 6-2, to tie the Series. The following day the Giant pitching staff fell apart completely. Jansen, Kennedy, Corwin and Konikowski took a 13-1 lacing from the Yankee bombers.

With a last-gasp effort, the Giants had pushed across two runs in the ninth inning of the final sixth game to make it close. But the Yankees finally wrapped it up, 4-3, to win the World Series.

In the Giant dressing room afterward President Stone-

ham comforted the crestfallen players. "It would have been nice to win the World Series, too," he said. "But I'm perfectly satisfied. Nobody could reasonably ask for anything more after the way you fellows came on to win the pennant."

It was a feeling shared by everyone else concerned. This had been a magnificent, incredible season. In a sensational six-week drive, the Giants had closed a gap of thirteen and a half games and won the pennant from a club considered so far superior it just couldn't be beaten. It was the first pennant to fly over Coogan's Bluff in fourteen years.

The strangest part of it all, and the most rewarding, was that under the old Durocher the Giants would never have achieved it. Only the new Durocher could have made it possible.

The old Durocher, brassy, arrogant, impatient and contemptuous of others, could never have guided this Giant team to such a victory. When rookie Willie Mays broke in during the season with a prolonged batting slump, the old Durocher would have blistered his hide with a tongue-lashing and sent him hiding into a corner of the dugout. He might easily have broken the kid's heart.

But when the youngster, crying, came to Leo and asked the manager to take him out of the line-up for the good of the team, Durocher led him aside and calmed him. "Don't worry, son," said Leo, draping a friendly arm around Willie's heaving shoulders. "You'll get going. Just take it slow. Remember, the way you're grabbing 'em off out there, you're my center fielder even if you don't get another hit all season."

A shining-eyed, confident Mays bounced back and started hitting like a demon from then on.

The Durocher of 1951 was indeed a transformed man. In the dark days of the early season losing streak, the one-time noisy, pop-off, castigating Leo went quietly about the business of straightening out his team. He took the blame for the Giants' poor start on himself. His calm, stubborn refusal to quit was contagious, and the team finally clicked under his persuasive urging.

Just as Leo blamed himself for the Giants' reversals, so did the new Durocher give all credit for the triumph to the players. The sports writers were stunned. The old Durocher would have slapped himself on the back with both hands after such a monumental victory. But now he accepted the praise with honest humility.

"Give all the credit to my players, fellows," he told the flabbergasted writers. "They did it themselves. All I did was wave them in from the third base coaching box," he said quietly.

Despite Durocher's modest protestations, it wasn't quite as simple as that. He took a colorless, complacent ball club and inspired it to the most miraculous pennant march of modern times. He kept a fire burning under his players when most other managers would have given up and settled gladly for a second-place finish. He juggled an undependable pitching staff to perfection. He took an outfielder—Whitey Lockman—and put a first baseman's mitt on his hand. He sent a raw Negro rookie—Willie Mays—into center field and made him a star. He took one of the best center fielders in baseball—Bobby Thomson—

and made him into a third baseman. And he won the pennant with them.

Yes, the 1951 miracle of the Giants was Leo Durocher's miracle.

No one was surprised when the nation's sports writers overwhelmingly acclaimed Leo Durocher the Manager of the Year for 1951.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE



THE TWO YEARS following the great Giant victory of 1951 saw a sharp reversal of their fortunes, as if to provide a respite between the hysteria of that year and the exciting season of 1954 to come.

The club's two leading Negro stars, Monte Irvin and Willie Mays, were lost to the line-up. Irvin broke his ankle sliding into a base, and Willie, the "Say Hey Kid," put on the uniform of Uncle Sam after playing the first thirty-four games of the season. The Giants were in first place the day Mays left. When they lost him, they promptly slid from the top and never regained the lead. The team finished second, well behind the Dodgers.

The failure the following year of pitching aces Sal Maglie and Larry Jansen took the heart right out of the Giant mound corps. They won only twenty games out of their last sixty-four of the season, finishing a dismal fifth, thirty-five games back. It was a far cry from the team that covered itself with glory two short years before.

Many observers expected that the new Leo, who had appeared humble and subdued during the 1951 success, would revert to his former irritating, noisy self with the coming of adversity to the Giants. But they were wrong. Durocher continued his gradual reformation, so much so,

in fact, that he became known less and less as Leo, the Lip, and more and more as Leo, the Silent Strategist.

The 1954 season got under way on a hopeful note. During the winter the Giants had obtained two excellent additions to their pitching staff—Johnny Antonelli and Don Liddle—in a trade with the Braves. To Milwaukee went the hero of 1951, Bobby Thomson. No one thought Durocher would dare trade Thomson after his famous home run that won the 1951 pennant, but Durocher had defied sentiment before when it concerned the welfare of the team.

As he did when he traded Mize, Cooper, Gordon and the rest several years before, Leo was sacrificing batting power for the strength he felt the club lacked most. The first time he obtained Stanky and Dark, and it paid off. Now it was pitching strength that he needed, and a trade at first unpopular paid off again.

Willie Mays was back—laughing Willie who always ran out from under his cap chasing fly balls. His presence in the Giant line-up again could not be overestimated.

“Willie is more than just a great ballplayer,” Durocher said when Mays returned from the Army. “He’s terrific for team spirit. They’re a different bunch of guys with him in there. He gives them a lift. Everybody is laughing and having a good time.”

The 1954 season turned out to be the third time in four years that the Giants and Dodgers battled it out for the pennant. As soon as the league settled down after the early break from the gate, it was apparent that these two clubs would be fighting it out right down to the wire. Only Milwaukee was given an outside chance, if the Giants and Dodgers were to kill each other off in the conflict.

On June 15th the Giants broke a deadlock with Brooklyn and took over undisputed possession of first place. They never lost it again. Every move Leo Durocher made that season seemed to have a touch of genius. He could do no wrong. His pinch hitters whacked home runs that won ball games; his relief pitchers slammed the door in enemy faces to choke off threatening rallies; his line-ups, changing almost daily, always seemed to have just the right man coming up to bat in a vital moment.

Not all of it could be dismissed as Durocher luck. Maybe it was Leo playing his hunches, but on closer examination many of his moves bore the unmistakable mark of sound, logical baseball.

A week after the season opened, critics were asking why Leo hadn't put pitcher Johnny Antonelli into the regular starting rotation, but Leo maintained a closemouthed silence. When May came and Antonelli, a \$65,000 bonus player at Milwaukee, was still being used only as a spot pitcher, the critics' harping became an insistent clamor.

Durocher calmly ignored the catcalls and waited until the Giants' first western trip to work Antonelli into the starting rotation. When the clever southpaw started racking up the wins, the critics hollered, "We told you so!"

What the armchair strategists had failed to realize, however, was that Antonelli had come to the Giants with a peculiar background. When he joined the Braves in 1948, he was eighteen. For three frustrating years he sat on the bench, a promising kid who didn't get to pitch regularly, but who couldn't be sent down to the minor leagues because he was a bonus player. Then, after a two-year stint in the Army, the Braves made him a starting pitcher in 1953.

Durocher, with his newly acquired wisdom and patience, had the feeling that the comparatively inexperienced youngster hadn't acquired the confidence necessary to be a starting pitcher on a pennant-contending team. The pressure might be too much. So Leo carefully eased Antonelli into the regular Giant rotation, picking the spots judiciously, building up his confidence. All Antonelli did for the Giants in 1954 was win twenty-one games!

Durocher's selection of pinch hitters throughout the 1954 season couldn't have been better had he used a genuine crystal ball. Whoever he plucked off the bench came through. Often his method seemed like madness, but it produced results.

One of the most talked about of Leo's substitutions came in August, when the Giant lead was being whittled down by the advancing Dodgers. With the bases loaded one day and the Giants trailing by one run, Durocher sent Bobby Hofman up to pinch-hit for Don Mueller, then in the midst of a twenty-game hitting streak. Everybody in the Polo Grounds, including most of the Giants, thought Leo had lost his senses. Mueller was a great hitter, batting at .345. Hofman was hitting .220.

When Hofman singled to drive across two runs, everyone marveled at Durocher's amazing run of luck. The move just hadn't figured—except to Leo.

"The way I saw it," Durocher said after the game, when reporters questioned the play, "Mueller seldom hits the long ball—and remember, it's bases loaded at the time. Don hits a lot on the ground, sharply. He could easily have hit into a double play. Hofman is a good pull hitter and usually gets the ball into the air. He hits a fly ball, I get the tying

run. He doesn't figure to crack into a double play as much as Mueller."

On Tuesday, September 21st, at Ebbets Field, the Giants clinched the 1954 pennant, with Sal Maglie, the "Barber," beating Carl Erskine and the Dodgers, 7-1. That day, too, Willie Mays got three hits and took over the batting leadership from the Dodgers' Duke Snider. Willie went on to win the title.

In the Giant clubhouse after the deciding game, Leo Durocher tried to make himself heard above the bedlam. "They were wonderful, just wonderful," the beaming Leo told reporters. "I hope the Giant fans are as happy as I am today."

"Walter Alston sure lost this one," someone said, referring to the manager of the Dodgers, the strong preseason favorites.

Durocher shook his head sympathetically. "He did a great job considering the injuries he had this year. Alston's a real nice guy."

"Well, you always said nice guys finish last, Leo," said a sports writer, kidding Leo about his now famous remark.

Durocher smiled tolerantly. "Well, maybe not all the time," he said.

The Giant triumph had been a convincing one, but beating the Cleveland Indians in the World Series was another matter. This Indian team had won 111 games, breaking the American League record of 110 set by the great Yankees of 1927. They had a superb pitching staff, headed by Early Wynn, Bob Lemon, Mike Garcia and Hal Newhouser. They had power, personified by Al Rosen and Larry Doby, two of the American League's leading hitters.

But the Giants had something a little extra of their own—Leo Durocher.

The Giants went into the World Series heavy underdogs, but they knew what Durocher expected of them. They had absorbed his spirit. They were cool, confident, eager for battle.

The Indians never knew what hit them. In four straight games the inspired, determined Giants humbled the favored American League champions. It wasn't even close. The Giants outhit, outpitched and outhustled the Indians. And it was generally conceded that Leo Durocher had out-managed Al Lopez.

It was the first time in forty years that a National League team had swept a World Series. It was Durocher's first world championship in three tries, the first for the Giants since 1933.

An old Cardinal teammate of Leo's from the glorious days of the Gashouse Gang charged into the Giant clubhouse after the final victorious game, expecting to come upon a scene of wild revelry. The clubhouse presented a picture of happy victory, certainly, but the visitor was struck by the comparative calmness in the room.

He walked over to congratulate Durocher. "Leo," he said, the surprise evident in his voice, "in the old days the Gashouse Gang would have torn this place apart after a victory like yours."

"Times change," Leo said, with a quiet smile. "Players change. We're all proud and happy at what we've done. But it's all part of the game. With a few breaks the other way, we could have been the team next door," he said, inclining his head toward the Indians' dressing room.

"Times have changed, all right," sighed the old Gas-houser. Then as he grasped Leo's hand warmly, he said, "You've changed, too, Leo. For the better. Hear those cheers out there? They're for you. You're the greatest manager in baseball!"

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR



IT WAS APRIL, 1955. A raw wind was blowing in off the Harlem River, carrying with it angry gusts of rain that collected in scattered pools on the tarpaulin covering the infield. The television cameras stood untended, shrouded in canvas like pieces of ghostly furniture in a deserted house. Huddled deep behind the protective overhang of the upper stands, a few hardy spectators waited for the umpires to call off the ball game officially.

There would be no baseball today at the Polo Grounds.

In his dugout Leo Durocher, manager of the World Champion New York Giants, sat elbows on knees, chin cupped in hands, looking out on the depressing scene. It made him comfortably drowsy. On the bench on Durocher's left were Giant players Alvin Dark and Hoyt Wilhelm, dressed in their warm-up jackets. On Durocher's right were sports writers Arch Murray of the *New York Post* and Jim McCulley of the *New York Daily News*. At the far end of the bench sat Durocher's little boy Chris, in his regulation Giant uniform, complete to the big number 2 on his back—his dad's number.

The sports writers, angling for a story, with the game a probable washout, were needling Durocher about the

Giants' poor start, trying to arouse him, get him angry enough to argue and give them a worth-while quote.

"This weather reminds me of the Giants," Murray said to McCulley, winking broadly.

"Yeah," said McCulley, picking up the cue. "But this I know is going to stop someday. About the Giants I'm not so sure."

Durocher shifted in his seat, leaned out of the dugout and craned his neck at the sky. "If they're going to call it, I wish they'd call it and get it over with," he said, as if he hadn't heard a word the two writers had spoken.

"Well anyway," McCulley offered, "if you can't play you can't lose; right, Leo?"

"A hundred per cent right, Jim," Leo said. "On the other hand, if you can't play you can't win, either. Right?" he said, throwing the ball right back in McCulley's lap.

"You know, Leo," Murray put in, "some of the fellows in the press box were saying that if you had used Gomez in relief the other day instead of McCall, you might have saved the game. What about that?"

Durocher turned his head to look at the writer. "Who you kidding, Arch?" he asked mildly. "You fellows know as well as I do that Gomez is a hot weather pitcher. He wouldn't even have gotten warmed up in time with the weather the way it was that day. It was colder than today."

"Well, something is wrong around here, Leo," McCulley said. "You got to admit that much. This sure doesn't look like the gang that beat the Indians last year. What's wrong with the team? Got any ideas for a shake-up?"

Durocher shook his head. "We'll get straightened out. We've gotten off to bad starts before. It hurts, of course,

to lose any game. But I'm not blaming anybody in particular. I think I know where the trouble is, and I know it will get straightened out."

"Where?" Murray probed. "Where is the trouble, Leo?"

"Well, I don't want to be putting you guys off," Durocher said quietly. "I know you're looking for a story." He smiled. "But I think this is just one of those things better off not talked about. No sense making a fuss over nothing."

The rain was coming down harder now, in steady sheets of water that obscured the bleachers from the view of the men in the dugout. Finally the umpires announced their decision to postpone the game.

"That's it, fellows," Durocher said. "Come on, Chris," he called to his son. "Let's go home."

"Same line-up tomorrow, Leo?" Murray asked. "Same pitcher?"

Durocher hesitated a moment. Then he nodded. "Same pitcher."

"Boy," Murray said to McCulley when Durocher had gone, "the guy even has to think twice before he tells us who his pitcher's going to be. Getting a story out of Leo these days is like pulling a shark's teeth."

"Yeah," agreed McCulley. "Remember in the old days? You were afraid to turn your back for a minute because Leo was always popping off about something or somebody."

"Well, let's pack it in," said Murray, rising from the bench. "You filing your story from upstairs?"

"I'm trying to make up my mind," McCulley said. "I was thinking of going back to the office and doing it, as long as there's no game. How about you?"

Murray shook his head. "I'm going to file now. Then

I figured I'd stop off downtown at Toots Shor's for a while. Maybe I'll find out something. You can almost get more dope about the Giants from Toots these days than you can from Durocher."

"It's funny," McCulley mused. "I mean how Leo's changed. He admits things aren't going right and he says he knows why, but he doesn't want to stir up a fuss by talking to us about it. There was a time he'd be yelling so loud they'd hear him in the bleachers, cursing the blinking umpires and the blinking weather, blaming his troubles on this player or that one." McCulley shook his head in wonder. "Remember how he used to smash the light bulbs in the locker room when he was thrown out of a game?"

"Yeah, it's funny, all right," Murray agreed gravely, recalling the old days, the days of the noisy, strutting, disagreeable Durocher. "You know, Jim," he said, "Leo has always played pretty square with me. But there was a time when I felt—both as a baseball fan and a reporter—that I wouldn't give a darn if Leo Durocher quit or was thrown out of baseball tomorrow."

"I know exactly what you mean, Arch," McCulley said. "Most everybody else felt that way, too."

"But no more," Murray said. "Now, if Leo were to leave baseball for any reason, I think it would be a terrible loss. Not only to the Giants, but to baseball. And as to my way of thinking, the season's a long way from being over."

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE



SUNDAY, MAY 1, 1955, dawned bright and clear, a sharp contrast to the miserably cold, damp spring which had so accurately mirrored the New York Giants' fortunes to date. The World Champions of 1954 were bogged down in the depths of the second division, while their arch rivals, the Brooklyn Dodgers, had jumped off to a commanding lead over the league.

The lone bright spot for the Giants on that May 1st morning was that the only two defeats suffered by the Dodgers so far had been administered by the Giants. Brooklyn's record-setting ten-game winning streak had been broken, too, the week before by the same Giants.

But manager Leo Durocher fretted over the inability of his team to get going. The weather had been bad, that was part of it. Ace relief pitcher Hoyt Wilhelm had been bitten by the flu bug. Ruben Gomez, the pitcher from Cuba, didn't like the cold springs in New York. He just couldn't get loose, had lost two games without winning one. The cold and the dampness had stiffened Sal Maglie's aging pitching arm. The masterful old hurler had lost three straight, without a win for the season. Even the Dodgers, who had usually fallen meekly before the dreaded "Barber," had slammed him the week before at Ebbets Field.

Yet Durocher knew the weather hadn't been any better for the Dodgers. And what excuse did his hitters have? Hank Thompson, Monte Irvin, Wes Westrum and Whitey Lockman, representing half Leo's batting order, sported a combined batting average of little over .200. The pinch hitters, so great in the clutch last year, were failing terribly this season. Only Don Mueller and Davey Williams of the regulars were carrying their share of the load at the plate.

Things couldn't get much worse, reflected Leo Durocher that Sunday morning, but they had better get better—and fast. Today he'd have Johnny Antonelli, his big winner of 1954, starting on the mound against the Cincinnati Redlegs. Maybe Antonelli could get the Giants started on the right road.

The lean left-hander had lost his first two efforts of the season, beaten both times by Robin Roberts of the Phillies, but in his last effort he had looked sharp beating his old mates, the Milwaukee Braves, 3-2. Today he'd be facing the Redlegs' slim, clever right-hander Johnny Klippstein.

It was quite a ball game. For the first three innings both hurlers matched no-hitters. Not a ball was hit hard. Then, in the fourth, the Giants broke through.

Alvin Dark led off the Giants' half of the fourth with a hit through the right side. Klippstein, working carefully to Don Mueller, got him to bounce an easy grounder to third baseman Ray Jablonski. But the third sacker, too eager for the double play, threw wildly over second base into right field. Mueller was safe and Dark sped around to third.

Willie Mays came up next. Again Klippstein bore down. On a one and one pitch Mays grounded sharply to second

base for the start of a double play, but Dark scored for the first run of the game.

Antonelli nursed that one-run lead carefully. His control was bad. He hit a couple of batters and walked four, but in the clutch he was superb. With men on base behind him he was untouchable. For six innings he continued to pitch no-hit ball.

To open the seventh frame Antonelli retired Gus Bell on a soft fly to Dusty Rhodes. Then Stan Palys, who had been acquired from the Phillies the day before, dashed Antonelli's bid for the Hall of Fame with a smashing single off Henry Thompson's glove. Antonelli disposed of the next two batters easily to end the mild threat.

With two out in the eighth, however, Antonelli found himself in his first serious trouble of the afternoon. Temple was on first, with a walk. Kluszewski singled him to third. Now Ray Jablonski, the cleanup hitter, stepped into the batter's box.

Antonelli stepped off the mound and wiped his face on the sleeve of his uniform. The day was comfortably cool but the pitcher's shirt was blotched with dark patches of sweat. The pressure was on. The Giants couldn't afford to keep dropping these close contests.

The New York ace climbed back on the rubber and took the sign from catcher Ray Katt. He whipped over his fast ball and Jablonski promptly cracked it on a line into the left field corner. Temple scored easily with the tying run, Kluszewski racing into third as Jablonski made it to second with a ringing double.

It was now a one-one tie, two runners in scoring posi-

tion and the ever-dangerous Gus Bell at the plate. Antonelli, his control still off, got behind—three balls and one strike. Bell swung on the next pitch and rapped it smartly to the right side. Williams glided over, gloved it, threw to Lockman and the damage was over.

Neither side could score in the ninth and the game went into extra innings. Joe Nuxhall was now pitching for Cincinnati, Klippstein having retired for a futile pinch hitter in the eighth. Through the tenth, the eleventh, the twelfth inning the two teams fought, battling for the one run that would win the game. In the thirteenth the Redlegs brought on Jackie Collum to pitch, but Antonelli remained in for the Giants.

Before Antonelli went out to pitch the fourteenth, however, Durocher called him aside. "How's the arm, Johnny?" Leo asked anxiously.

"Okay, skipper," Antonelli nodded.

"You're sure now, Johnny," Leo insisted. "We want to win this game, but not if it's going to hurt your arm. There's a lot of baseball still to be played yet. And you've got a long career ahead of you. Maybe it's too early in the year for you to be going so many innings."

Antonelli shook his head. "Don't worry, Leo," he said. "I'm feeling fine. Just get me that one run, that's all. I can hold them."

And hold them Antonelli did. Again, before the start of the sixteenth inning, Durocher questioned Antonelli about his arm. But the stouthearted young hurler refused to quit.

In the bottom half of the sixteenth Whitey Lockman, who had fielded brilliantly throughout the game, opened

with a single to right field. Dark sacrificed, moving Lockman to second. With Don Mueller the next batter, Cincinnati manager Birdie Tebbets signaled Bob Hooper, his fourth hurler, to walk Mueller intentionally. Hooper delivered three wide pitches.

Then came the fourth toss. It wasn't as wide as Hooper intended and—to the utter amazement of a delighted, roaring crowd—Mueller reached out with his bat and stroked it into left field for a single. Lockman, at second base, was so startled by the unorthodox play that he was rooted to the spot. "Run! Run, Whitey!" Durocher yelled from the third base coaching box, and finally a bewildered Lockman raced into third.

The Redlegs pulled Hooper and called in right-hander Bill Ridzik to pitch to Bill Gardner. Durocher countered this move with lefty Bill Taylor pinch-hitting for Gardner. On the second pitch Taylor drove a towering drive to the Giants' bull pen. Wally Post, the right fielder, gave futile chase as the ball trickled off the edge of his straining fingers. Lockman loped across the plate with the winning run, as a jubilant band of Giants showered Antonelli with their congratulations.

It had been an iron man, sensational hurling performance by the brilliant young left-hander. He had pitched to fifty-seven batters, giving up just six hits over the sixteen innings.

There was a new, refreshing atmosphere in the Giants' clubhouse after that exciting game. No horseplay, no reckless boasting, but a definite air of quiet confidence in the future.

"This was the kind of game we've been blowing during

the past couple of weeks," said Leo Durocher. "It's losing the tight ones that kills you inside, discourages you. Now we know we can win when the chips are down."

"How about that hit by Mueller?" a reporter asked Leo. "Did you give him the sign to swing at it?"

"Me?" said Durocher. "I was as surprised as anybody. It was great thinking on Don's part. They don't call him 'Mandrake the Magician' for nothing. He can really do tricks with that bat."

Mueller walked over then. "Thanks for the compliment, skipper," he said to Durocher. "But we still have you to thank for that hit. Back in spring training you told us to watch out for an opportunity like this one. When Hooper started throwing 'em wide I inched closer to the plate, remembering what you said. And it worked."

Durocher nodded. "But it was your bat that hit it, and it was great, Don," he beamed. "Anyway, I think we're back on the right track now. The boys feel a lot better about things," he said to the sports writers. "If we can get some more good weather to help our pitchers come around, we'll be on our way. First stop is that .500 mark. Then the Dodgers."

"They're going to be tough to catch," a sports writer said. "They look unbeatable."

"We've heard that one before," came back Durocher. "In 1951, for example. Maybe it won't work out that way this year, but nobody's unbeatable. The Dodgers will know they've been in a fight before this season's much older. And the Giants are just the team to show it to them."

"And you too, eh, Leo?" grinned the sports writer.

"It's the same thing, isn't it?" asked Leo. "Me—and the Giants?"

To which a couple of million Giant rooters would respectfully respond, "It is as far as we're concerned, Leo. For as long as you want it that way."

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